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THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS

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A SURVEY OF THE NOVEL
BY TWENTY CONTEMPORARY NOVELISTS

Edited by
Derek Verschoye

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INTRODUCTION

Derek Verschoye

INTRODUCTION

By Derek Verschoyle

A NEW book about the English Novel requires a few sentences of explanation. Not because, as it might appear at first glance, its purpose is to discuss a subject already so overlaid with criticism that a new book is an embarrassment, but because its aim is to discuss a subject about which, on the evidence of a score of attempts, a really satisfactory book seems impossible to produce. The only book which in its combination of scholarship and critical acumen approaches the ideal is Professor Walter Raleigh's delightful survey *The English Novel*, but its age and its scope make it of severely restricted use to the reader of today. It was published in 1894 and it ends with Sir Walter Scott, and so it does not discuss (of the writers whom Raleigh could have included) Dickens, Peacock and Meredith and (of the writers whom he could not) the later Henry James, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, all of whom obviously must be considered in any survey that is to be adequate to the needs of today. That Raleigh's book still holds the field for any practical purpose is because the forty-odd years since it was first published have not produced anything to supersede it or even (what would have been equally useful) to complement it. The only two books of the highest order which have appeared on the subject during the present century—Mr E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Mr Edwin Muir's *The Structure of the Novel*—did not aim at being comprehensive, and threw their illumination only on chosen corners of

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the territory, and the only modern book planned to cover the whole ground (it is not yet completed) is Professor Ernest A. Baker's *History of the English Novel*, which is lexicographical rather than critical in purpose and method, and apparently designed primarily to assist the neutral endeavours of the research student. There have been at least half a dozen other assaults on the novel besides these made in recent years, but none of them has achieved a substantial success. It is clear that a new book on the subject is not deprived of justification by the sufficiency of its predecessors.

This book is largely the result of personal dissatisfaction at the lack of any book about the novel, more up to date than Raleigh's and more comprehensive in scope than Mr Forster's, which could be recommended to a reader reasonably well acquainted with the outlines of the subject and appreciative of good criticism. So far as I am aware, it is not the duplicate of any existing book on the subject either in its purpose or in its method. Its purpose is not to provide a chronologically complete survey of the English novel from its origins down to the present day, but to trace the *development* of English fiction through the five and a half centuries during which it has been written by discussing the writers who have made the most important contributions to its growth—to provide, as it were, a critical genealogy of the best fiction that is being written in the English language today. Its method is primarily the result of defects of scholarship and critical ability which prevented me from attempting to write myself a book which I thought would fulfil a useful purpose and for which fairly frequent enquiries persuaded me there is a certain demand. Nineteen writers have collaborated with me in producing it in this form: each of the chapters, dealing in most cases with one but sometimes

BY DEREK VERSCHOYLE

with two or three writers, is the work of a living English or American novelist¹ who is also a critic and qualified by a specialist's knowledge to assess authoritatively the contribution made to the development of the novel by a particular predecessor. If anyone feels obliged to raise the traditional objection that practitioners of a craft commonly do not make the best judges of their fellow-craftsmen, one must reply that much the best, in fact the only good, critics of fiction writing today are themselves novelists of repute.

I do not expect that every reader will approve of my selection of subjects from the long list of English novelists: in fact I am prepared to find at least a dozen separate omissions deplored. But in case the relatively short length of this book should encourage suspicions on that score, I must make it clear in advance that I will not plead limitation of space as a reason for any of my exclusions. I have included every writer that I thought relevant to my scheme, and what may seem the obvious errors of omission—the exclusion of Lord Berners, Greene, Nash, Mrs Aphra Behn, Bunyan, Swift, Horace Walpole, George Eliot, George Moore—all seemed to me necessary if I was not to modify and enlarge its purpose. If my object had been to illustrate the development of English prose and not of the novel, I should naturally have included, from among those writers that I have just said that I have excluded here, Berners, Bunyan, Swift and possibly Moore. But, as a novel, Berners' *Huon of Bordeaux* is no advance upon Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* which had preceded it in print by forty-nine years, and Swift and Bunyan lived about a hundred and about fifty years too late respectively for any of their work (with the conceiv-

¹ Mr Louis MacNeice, who contributes the chapter on Sir Thomas Malory, has written his fiction under a pseudonym.

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able exception of Bunyan's *The Holy War*, but certainly not of *Pilgrim's Progress*) to demand consideration in a survey of the development of the novel. The others, with one exception, I have omitted simply because, however great their admitted importance in other respects, none of them seemed to me to have made innovations of any significance in the writing of prose fiction—they merely consolidated the positions which their predecessors had gained, and so did not come within the scope of this survey. The exception is Horace Walpole, who was certainly an innovator and an influential one, but once the movement to which he gave an impetus had petered out, his influence survived only in a class of writing which has but a remote connexion with the novel proper, and to which I find it impossible to attach either interest or importance, I mean detective fiction.

For my inclusions I do not propose to give any reasons here, because no short explanation could so effectively reveal my purpose as the essays of my contributors which follow this introduction. To them I wish here to record my gratitude for their generous and gifted collaboration.

FREDERIC PROKOSCH

Geoffrey Chaucer

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

By Frederic Prokosch

I

IF we say that the reputation as a created masterpiece of *Troilus and Criseyde* has suffered by comparison with that of *The Canterbury Tales*, it is implied that Chaucer's gifts as a narrator, a teller of tales, might be considered to have reached a higher point than his gifts as a novelist. But we mean more than that, really. We mean that he is less a master of architectonics, of prolonged concentration, of extended psychology, than a master of brilliant miniature, of exuberant anecdote, of the brief, quivering, ecstatic moment. And that is true. But it is true to a far lesser degree than might be supposed at first sight; and on repeated readings *Troilus and Criseyde* emerges as a work of far subtler and more exquisite qualities than we had imagined—indeed, as the loveliest as well as the first of our English novels.

It is not to be thought that these qualities will be here defined and anatomized: that unfortunately is not possible. But a brief review of Chaucer's particular and unexpected virtues as a novelist and of his unsuspected stratagems might not be too difficult a task. And then we may be left to our own wistful conjectures as to what the subsequent history of the English novel has done to preserve and enhance the various powers and delights here signalled.

Consider, for example, the unparalleled sense of *flow* which the poem gives us; not only flow of style, and of

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narrative, but of matter. The tale expands from the crude narrative that Boccaccio dishes before us, stanza by stanza, in the most touching manner, into something new, fresh, pulsating. But so delicately that we hardly notice such a blossoming. And by the most surprising of devices: flashes of detail—

And down she sette hire by hym on a stoon
Of jaspre, upon a guysshyn gold-ybete;

sudden alterations of tone—

Therwith al rosy hewed tho wex she,
And gan to humme, and seyde, 'so I trowe';

the actual echoing voice of Chaucer's own delight—

God woot if he sat on his hors a-right,
Or goodly was beseyn, that ilke day!

In fact, the very onrush seems to consist to a large degree of a pretty leaping from here to there, sudden bursts of energy and affection, *changeableness*. This is only one of the contradictions apparent in his technique: how he achieves harmonies and perfections by the very act of ignoring them. The very changefulness effects a melting together—affection and sarcasm, intimacy and aloofness—all elements flow together and produce an odd quivering liveliness and loveliness, like that of a rippling stream that springs over sand, over pebble, through sunlight and shadow. It eludes us; the taste vanishes as soon as the tale is ended. Yet curiously enough, it conveys a wonderful sense of control. Indeed, "control" may be as good a single word as any to apply to Chaucer above all other writers. But more of this presently.

The flow; and then the clarity of events and setting—even to the point of obviousness now and then. Chaucer was a modest soul. He did not enjoy thinking of himself

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as higher to any degree than his readers, or anyone else. He is happy to give us the most ordinary and palpable details:

When he was come un-to his neces place,
"Where is my lady?" to hir folk seyde he;
And they him tolde; and he forth in gan pace,
And fond, two othere ladyes sete and she
With-inne a paved parlour; and they three
Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
Of the Sege of Thebes, whyl hem leste.

He wants to tell us his story, above all; and he wants to help us as much as he can. That is always worth remembering.

And so he *selects* for us as well, mindful of the weariness of the human ear and eye and mind. Like the French painter, he ignores a great deal, a very great deal. One glimpse of character is enough; of Diomedé, "fresshe as a branche in May", of Criseyde, "tendre-herted, slydyng of corage". Or one phrase to give us the setting—the "paved parlour" mentioned above. Or a swift fragment of dialogue (and his dialogue, surely, has never been excelled!)—

"Nay, therof spak I not, a, ha!" quod she,
"As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!"
"O mercy, dere nece," anon quod he,
"What-so I spak, I mente nought but weel,
By Mars the god, that helmed is of steel;
Now beth nought wrooth, my blood, my nece dere."
"Now wel," quod she, "forgeven be it here!"

What he wishes to give us is the single flash, which pleases and affects us because of its very isolation. And one natural but unexpected result of this is that of his numberless effects, almost all are accomplished only once. We have the flash, with unerring instinct, once; but not again.

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One thinks particularly of such an unparalleled bit as that in Book II—certainly one of the most magical moments in our literature:

A nightingale, upon a cedre grene,
Under the chambre-wal ther as she lay,
Ful loude sang ayein the mone shene,
Paraunter, in his briddes wyse, a lay
Of love, that mad hir herte fresh and gay.
That herked she so longe in good entente,
Til at the laste the dede sleep hir hente.

And, as she sleep, anon-right tho hir mette,
How that an egle, feathered whyt as boon,
Under hir brest his longe clawes sette,
And out hir herte he rente, and that a-noon,
And dide his herte in-to hir brest to goon,
Of which she nought agroos ne no-thing smerte,
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte.

Read Chaucer through and through, but you will never find that kind of loveliness again. The same is true of that quick moment of tragic irony, as Troilus gazes down on the world from the seventh sphere, down on "this litel spot of erthe, that with the see Enbraced is"; and of the final stanza when the author finds himself so irresistibly moved, all against his will, and thinks of Dante:

Thou oon, and two, and three, eterne on-lyve,
That regnest ay in three and two and oon,
Uncircumscrip, and al mayst circumscryve,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende; and to thy mercy, everychoon,
So make us, Jesus, for the grace, digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne! Amen.

But perhaps we have strayed from our point. To return: it is because Chaucer loves his reader, and is happy to find himself whispering in the reader's ear, that we get

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also a feeling of effortlessness, of almost constant ease and relaxation. This last is indeed truer, in general, of *The Canterbury Tales*. But it is eminently true of the middle sections of *Troilus and Criseyde* also. The novel ripples along like water; it would require far more effort to resist it than to follow it along. Surely no author has ever deported himself more considerately, more ingratiatingly, toward his readers.

II

Fluency; clarity; economy; ease. But the two greatest of his gifts are rather more difficult to put in a word. Yet they are things which, once apprehended, cause us to consider the appalling reluctance, or inability, or both, of his successors to master his devices. These devices may have been instinctive, but not wholly so; and after all, that is beside the point. Indeed, it might be suggested that the distinction between calculation and instinct is misleading in any case, for even the most elementary art calculates, and the most self-conscious art is instinctive—far more so than might appear. The first virtue to which I refer is this: Chaucer's marvellous command of shifting focus. Now sharp, immediate, exact, now remote, vague and misty; now external, objective, denotatory; now within the heart, subjective, the universal phrase that binds us all together—

Thus gan he make a mirour of his minde
In which he saugh al hoolly hir figure;

now here, in the walled garden, now in the vast world of love, or prayer, or calculation; now the gay and vivid city through which the Simois, clear as an arrow, runs downward to the sea, and now the nebulous sinister siege looming in the background; now formal and aloof, now affably taking the reader into his confidence—

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But whether that she children hadde or noon,
I rede it nought; therefore I let it goon;

now intently murmuring to himself—

Go, litel book, go litel myn tragedie,

and now exclaiming to the world with buoyant delight—

But ye lovers, that bathen in gladnesse,

and now, though rarely, speaking almost in terror, with the memory of years, as in the last stanza of the poem.

Perhaps I have expanded this point beyond its proper bounds. What I wish to suggest is not Chaucer's variety, but the more subtle and technical matter of the shift itself, in distance and degree of penetration as well as in matter and tone. It is the same trick, really, that the expert film-director has mastered. Both are aware of how the spectator's eye grows weary from uniform strain, and needs change, and both accomplish this relief by a subtle variation of focus. It is an almost physical thing, this preservation of the reader's nerves. And at its best its purpose is not simply to spare the reader entirely, but rather to prepare his senses for each new effect; to make him most capable of assimilating what is about to come.

Shakespeare also possessed this command of shift. But with him the shift is apt to be lightning fast—intense and dazzling rather than gentle and fluent. Shakespeare leaps into a self-identification with his protagonist far more frequently and far more completely; though at lesser times, rather too capriciously.

Such a technique of shift tends to create an effect of nervousness, of restlessness. But as long as the eye is faithfully and happily on the subject it supplies the magical potentiality. Lydgate, Occleve, Gower—how stolid and monotonous they seem beside Chaucer! Each of the three

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—even the unremunerative Lydgate—had certain admirable qualities that Chaucer lacked. But the flexible energy, the quivering line, the sudden tightening, these signals of the true artist, are lacking there; entirely so; just as they are, with conspicuous uniformity, always present in the most memorable fiction, whether it is *Daphnis and Chloe* or *La Princesse de Clèves* or *Jonathan Wild* or *A Passage to India* or *Ulysses*; and always absent in the thousands of forgotten romances.

The effect of this nervous shifting about on the characters, manifestly, is that we see them not only from every angle, but with every degree of vividness and intensity. And the plot too is unfolded with a similar variability, now clear, now through a misty film, now familiar as sunlight, now remote as a dream. It is precisely as we recognize the history of our own past to expand before our eyes, if we pause and consider it. It is faithful to our fretful and inconstant human psychology; and it always holds our attention, from beginning to end.

It has the unforeseen effect, too, of donating a secret loveliness of form. Indeed, it may even contribute a singleness of effect and of texture quite in defiance of its apparent variability. But this is a new subject which, however alluring, is too involved and subtle to be developed in the space of this essay.

III

As has just been said, what this shift of focus achieves is, in effect, a peculiarly delicate harmony, a conjunction of echoes. Each poignancy grows momentarily vivid, then fades and vanishes into the next, never to be quite recaptured. The effect, in a word, is one of delight. But it is a delight that results from hints and titivations, not

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from placid fulfilment. It leaves us with a feeling of longing, of expectant wonder, even of sadness, rather than one of satiety. And this brings us to our next point: what, for lack of a better word, might be called *suggestiveness*.

Chaucer might appear to have the quality of a primitive when considered as a novelist. But on closer inspection, as has been hinted, this quality fades and loses significance. He abounded in what the subsequent history of the English novel has failed ever to duplicate in such a high degree—urbanity, real sophistication, awareness to the last and most mellow degree. His words have amplitude; they echo; they are like pebbles dropped in the lake, producing rings of water, or like the sound of a bell, producing rings of sound. Proust's characteristic is that he too drops his pebble in the lake, but he pursues the rings of water himself, with intent and melancholy care; which accounts for the strange combination in him of ease and difficulty, of flow and perplexity. In Stendhal and Balzac we have somewhat the same quality of suggestiveness, but it is an odd thing that the quality is enhanced as the consciousness on the part of the author of his suggestiveness grows less apparent, or even completely invisible. And this last is even truer of Chaucer than it is of Shakespeare, and the result is one of eternal and evocative variety.

This suggestiveness operates most unmistakeably in his characterization. His characters are peculiarly elliptical. We are left to guess a good deal; we never know everything, nor do we ever understand them wholly. Their words have an odd way of lingering on in our consciousness; and their faces, like those to which in our actual lives we have come closest, are for ever felt, yet never seen with total clarity: the essence evaporates instantly on their departure, and their true quality can never be recaptured

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by remembered phrase or image. And the tale, too, has echoes. At the end we suspect that there are things which have never been clearly revealed to us, secret depths into which we have not been initiated. The author, in other words, never extends himself completely. And it is this feeling of *reserve* which we invariably get in our greatest fiction. Flaubert, Stendhal, Cervantes: how much these leave unsaid! And the same is true in the highest degree of Shakespeare, of course.

Chaucer's gusto, his breeziness, his vigour: these are easy enough to detect as such, and to relish. Far less likely to be apprehended are the oblique characterization, the loving insinuation. Yet it is the latter that work on the imagination with a far greater potency. The endless suggestiveness here, as in no other English novelist, not even Dickens, is their doing. They produce the magical touch in fiction, the rarest of all gifts. Of course, this brings fiction closer to poetry than we might choose to allow. The qualities of newness and elusiveness are made their common glory: they are there, in *Candide* as in Catullus. But from this very closeness the difference emerges.

It is curious enough that as a writer of fiction, a technician, a master of characterization and plot, this poet has had no superior; and that what we miss in his tales, since our modern age is too dull-witted and earnest to draw its own conclusions tacitly, is a quality more generally associated with poetry; I mean, intensity—not dramatic intensity, but rather the overt intentness of the contemplating spirit. Chaucer, as long as he was telling a story, never allowed it. That he was capable of it his translation of Boethius and his adoration of Dante should reveal beyond dispute. Yet it might not be too surprising to suggest that his most distinguishing qualities are

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those of a narrator and not of a poet. He is more deeply moved, obviously enough, by a contemplation of our human varieties of endurance and bliss, than by the multiple and intellectual flames of his own individual fire. The difference is a real one. And not quite the same can be said of Shakespeare, who after all was a poet first and then a dramatist. Chaucer's is a type of contemplation which acquires limberness in its humorous aloofness, its sly tenderness: we are never quite inside his characters, to repeat, and it might very well be questioned whether in fiction we really should be so. If we are, it may lead to a serious *impasse*: it certainly remains to be seen whether the self-identification of the author with the mind of his character—such as indulged in by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf—is capable of a cruder and, to be frank about it, more captivating expression. Isn't it apt to antagonize the reader by suggesting that the story was written for the author's own relief and self-exploitation, and not for the reader? Certain modern persons might consider such a question both naïve and meretricious. Yet, on considering the past ten or twenty centuries of fiction, it becomes difficult to believe that a story can be well told if the author is thinking more of his own gratification than of his reader's. In any case, the most enduringly and energetically lasting of all fictitious characters—for example, Falstaff, Sancho Panza, Becky Sharp, the Wyf of Bath, Parson Adams, Uncle Toby, Prince Genji, the Baron de Charlus—these are the creatures of an objective contemplation, sly and tender; not of self-identification, or of a quaint system of psychological compensation. They are gifts to the reader, presented with an ironical smile.

Satire, perhaps. But less purposeful than satire, really. Satire transformed, in Pandare and the Wyf of Bath as in Falstaff and the Baron, into something less easily named:

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something that evokes pity, love and terror, and banishes sentimentality for ever. Chaucer is never sentimental. His eye is always on the object, and so clearly that his registering reactions shift as instantly and ceaselessly as the object itself; so that there is no time for him to confuse the emotion of the object which is beheld with that of the beholder. Now and then comes the sudden flash into the heart, the instant when the author is infected and compelled. But that is a different thing. It lasts only for an instant in Chaucer. And in this he shows his unerring skill.

I hope that I have suggested that it is a mistake to consider Chaucer "natural" or "simple": and to call him "humorous" or "satirical" is equally misleading. He is, for one thing, subtle, urbane, knowing ("modern", I might have said, with the monstrous conceit of our age, which is actually of all ages the most confused and sentimental and prolix). And for another, he is stirred by a passion that is not the less true for being so constantly controlled, and even disguised.

IV

And this brings us to our last point. It might be asked, to what extent is a novelist's power dependent on his standards, his values, his ethical concepts? A difficult and unalluring problem, and one I don't propose to indulge in at length. A word or two, however.

It has been said that what we miss in Chaucer is the poetic intensity—that is, the articulate and individual intensity, the shrillness, the pity come to a head. He possesses the needle touch, but disdains the surgeon's knife: he lacks the real terror and revulsion that we find in Balzac, in Dostoëvski, in Swift, and, yes, in Dickens.

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And why? Because he was happy, he wished to change nothing. He was, I suppose, totally "normal". There never lived less of a propagandist. His values, what we see of them, are oddly serene; those of other novelists seem beside them rash, indiscriminate, fortuitous. He suggests in this respect another writer from whom he is less remote than might at first glance appear—Racine. Morals do not concern him; wickedness does not revolt him; injustice does not embitter him. It is the plight of the individual which moves him. And consequently, the passage of centuries will not disturb the lovely and universal compulsion of his vision of life.

His standards are in a sense those of the complete artist: his one demand is, be yourself, be what you are but be it wholly, and his one standard is, how nearly perfect are you of your kind? This feeling permeates everything. It is discernible in such a phrase as the nightingale singing "in his briddes wyse"; or in his delight with the Canon's Yeoman's sweat:

But it was joye for to seen hym swete!

It is this—a creature being true to itself, performing exhilaratingly and utterly in accord with its nature—that so moves him. There is no condemnation, ever. And more than anything it is this, I think, that gives to *Troilus and Criseyde* its miraculous and indescribable poignancy. He sees our flaws, and how they draw us into disaster and annihilation; and once or twice he is so moved by this prospect, as in the closing section of the tale, that he cannot avoid giving utterance to it. But he has not the heart to wish anything to be other than it is; in short, he is in love with our multifarious and labyrinthical world. And he rejects all codes, all standards, except the one, "Be thyself".

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Chaucer, as a teller of tales, had many models, though he excelled them all. As a novelist (and I trust that his right to the title will not be questioned)—as a novelist, he had none. And yet, with what unerring instinct he started off English fiction along the right lines. For which reason it is sufficiently saddening, as we contemplate the progress of the English novel, to see how the years have failed to provide his equal, have failed even to nourish and comprehend and pursue his particular promises. If we hope to find a continued development of his enchanting qualities as the English novel moves from generation to generation, we look in vain. We find unexpected splendours, but not these. For, whimsically enough, sincerity of purpose, fidelity, perseverance, honesty, earnest contemporaneousness, genuine concern for the ways of the world; those virtues to which our lesser critics do weekly obeisance: all these can be acquired by surprisingly many of us, if we only try, and enjoy a bit of luck. But those two secrets (which, like the two disturbing scorpions, are generally found in close proximity)—true and subtle perfection of form, true and loving vitality—these will elude even a lifetime's apprenticeship and prayer.

LOUIS MACNEICE

Sir Thomas Malory

SIR THOMAS MALORY

By Louis MacNeice

SOMETIMES in dreams the dream becomes palpably more substantial. The process is like scrambling eggs. From an indefinite froth comes, seemingly instantaneously, something with a recognizable texture, something one can put in one's mouth. When a dream behaves in this way, it is becoming a work of art. The effect is often one of healthy bathos. From a sickly-sweet twilight of indefinite sensations there emerges perhaps the exceedingly familiar, exceedingly detailed, figure of someone one knows, and this at once makes the dialectic of the dream concrete. So it is with Malory.

Malory has sometimes (rightly but not fairly) been censured for misunderstanding of his originals, prosaic outlook, bathos, poor construction and inconsistent portraiture—for his lack, in fact, of those two supposed essentials, method and a point of view. For this we should be thankful. The novel is not a school-exercise, ten marks for construction, five for characterization, three for the moral, two for the style.

The novel is the furthest removed literary form from the philosophical treatise. Even philosophical treatises can benefit from the random element (is it not perhaps its inconsistencies which have fascinated students of the *Critique of Pure Reason*?) but, generally speaking, a philosophical treatise should be completely under the control of the mind of the author, a novel not so. Of course

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very often a novelist thinks he is controlling his material when he is not. Even with such a self-conscious artist as James Joyce it looks in *Ulysses* as if it is his *material* which is making the running. Joyce is pre-eminently a selector but, as a true novelist, he selects by touch rather than by theory. Malory of course was a selector in a very narrow sense—namely, a redactor. He took a number of books in a foreign language and made out of them one book very much shorter in his own. If he had been a theorist, one-minded, Shavian, he would have gone about his job quite differently. His book would have come from his hands ready to be labelled—an exposition of artificial romantic love à la Chrestien de Troyes, or of mediaeval Christian mysticism with the stress on the Grael, or of pure chivalry with a fifteenth-century moral, or maybe a Celtic romance weltering in marvels, or a national epic purged of Gallic accretions and with the emphasis on Arthur's insularity, his hardy impudence against the Roman Emperor. But what reached Caxton's press was none of these things.

None because all. The *Morte D'Arthur* is a divine mix-up. If Miss Jessie Weston could have told Malory that the Grael is the superfoetation of Christianity upon a pagan vegetation myth, he would not have understood her but, if he could have understood her, he would have been very angry. The Grael, with its Cistercian subtleties, was difficult enough to handle as it was. Yet the vegetation myth, whether we call it that or not, is there. The Waste Land and the Wounded King represent something which is vastly old—Jung might call it an archetypal myth—and which the reader appreciates all the better because the symbolism is not explicit. The novelist's job is not to be explicit. To take Joyce once more as an example, Dedalus in *Ulysses* is a failure because it is clear what he is meant

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to be, Bloom may be meant to be something also but he is so incontrovertibly that his meaning is not given a chance to wreck him. Malory's characters are like Bloom rather than Dedalus. Which perhaps explains how it was that Ascham missed the point of the book and said that the whole pleasure of it "standeth in two speciall points, in open manslaughter and bold bawdrye". We know what some people think is the whole pleasure of *Ulysses*. It is a virtue in a novelist that his point is able to be missed.

Most people would not classify the *Morte D'Arthur* as a novel, but I cannot see why not. The *Odyssey*, according to T. E. Shaw, was the first European novel. Why not the *Iliad*? Presumably because of that desperate bugbear, "construction". I should prefer to call neither of them novels as they are both in verse. But the *Satyricon* of Petronius was a novel, so was the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius and so were the Icelandic Sagas. It is foolishly assumed that the novel, like tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics*, should possess (a) plot, (b) characterization. But Aristotle's distinction between plot and history will not hold in this *genre*; the psychologists moreover tell us, what we have always felt in our bones, that there are more kinds of continuity than one. As for characterization no one has ever made clear quite how differentiated or quite how substantiated the characters ought to be in a novel. Malory's claims to be a novelist are so minimal in the eyes of the purists that I will digress to go one worse in their eyes.

I believe that it would be possible to write a novel about two cricketers A and B (those might even be all they had for names) and confining oneself to their matches—scores, strokes and style—yet produce a readable book. Plot here would consist merely in cricket match after cricket match, while the character of A would differ from

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that of B merely in the external difference of their scores, etc., and the more internal difference of their cricketing technique. Note that in any character, in books or in life, it is impossible to draw a rigid line between his external or incidental attributes—what he does, wears, the shape of his face—and the internal or essential ones, what he thinks, feels. Note again that such a “plot” as that of my cricketing novel cannot be dismissed as no plot but mere repetition. One cannot merely repeat. Any enumeration of objects or events will take on a rhythm, as we read it, just as the monotony of the noise of a train takes on a rhythm as we listen to it.

I thought of cricket because I have often found myself taking pleasure day by day in reading the accounts, or merely the batting averages, of players whom I have never seen and do not wish to see. And many people perhaps read everything in the newspapers in this way. Why do they do this? Because, firstly, the newspaper heroes, sportsmen or politicians, are for them dream-figures, *though they know they are real people*; secondly, the repetition with variations of their performances (Mr Ramsay MacDonald . . . Mr Ramsay MacDonald . . .) builds up a vast and gentle rhythm in the back of the mind, hypnotizing us into an escape from reality; but it is the sort of escape people are said to find in opium. They see the real objects and they know they are the same but they see them different. Before any greater claims are put in for Malory, I must repeat my opening point and say that his book throughout gives me the same joy that I get in reading the sporting page in the daily papers or that I get when I see something heroically familiar, however banal, in a dream.

Malory got his heroes out of the French books. They were already a conflation of French and English with a

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dash of Welsh. Some will say (as Professor Vinaver in his charming book on Malory) that he clipped them into fifteenth-century Englishmen. This is an exaggeration. Malory's characters, more than those of most novelists, are knit up with their background and their background is not stable. The varied threads (how often this book is called a tapestry!) are compromised successfully. Malory is a master of half-conscious compromise, typically English. Thus even his *Quest of the Graal* is acceptable, though we must agree with Vinaver both that the mysticism of it was antipathetic to Malory (after all he was a robber of monasteries), that the Chapels Perilous, etc., were not his natural province, and that the Weltanschauung of the Graal, suppressed but not extinguished by Malory, clashes very badly with that of the Round Table. But there is much to be said for a clash, even if it is not intended.

Some years ago I used to be most irritated when I came to Book XIII and had to pass from the harpings and joustings of Tristram to the frigid perfection of Galahad. I see now that without Galahad, Lancelot, his unwilling father, would not be so great, or not so *tragically* great, a figure; just as without the Quests preceding it, the Morte proper, the dissolution of the Round Table, would not be a vast moral catastrophe but merely a crash in the cricket averages.

Professor Vinaver is undoubtedly right when he says that Malory wavers continually in his treatment of Lancelot and Guinevere—Malory's "most cherished ideal is that of happy marriage, and he forgets that marriage and a hero-lover like Lancelot are entirely incompatible". And Vinaver, quoting the passage where Lancelot condemns paramours, points out that it comes oddly from a man who is "the very embodiment of adulterous passion".

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But is this kind of inconsistency a flaw? It may be that Malory is inconsistent for a purely mechanical reason, that he cannot control his originals. I should prefer to think that he could see two sides of a question, that he could feel with Lancelot in his love as well as in his preaching. But whether he could or not, the fact is that this not too conspicuous vacillating between two or more worlds is something which, whether it is due to skill or accident, is greatly to be desired in novels because it represents, though far more gently, the bitter dialectic of opposites which makes humanity. Any child trained on the Dalcroze system can move two limbs simultaneously in different rhythms. Any civilized man can see simultaneously, or at least in rapid alternation, the point of marriage *à la* Malory and of love *à la* Lancelot.

The main themes and persons of the *Morte D'Arthur* have often been analysed. To illustrate my thesis that Malory to some extent benefited from the difficulties of his task, if not also from the deficiencies of his own mind (it does not hurt a novelist to be something of a zany), I would take the character of Sir Gawaine. Sir Gawaine took my fancy when I first read the book at the age of twelve. I have since tried to find the reason for this. He is not one of the villains, like King Mark or Morgan le Fay, but he more often than not is out of favour with his author. He is a strong knight but not a very knightly one. Perhaps I liked him because I felt that the author had a grudge against him. There are some half-dozen knights who can always beat him, and the reader acquires a sporting hope that he may give one of them a surprise. This sporting interest is a little counterbalanced by the fact that Gawaine has an unfair advantage in that his strength magically increases threefold towards noon. But "his wind and his evil will" increased with it, which gives him

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a brute attractiveness. The interest in Gawaine, however, is not merely a sporting one. If Gawaine were absent, not only would the mechanism of the catastrophe (Arthur's war with Lancelot and the revolt of Mordred) have to be contrived anew, but the book would lose a recurring *motif* of moral contrast. Of all the more important knights Gawaine is the furthest from being a paragon.

A curious thing is that in the earlier Arthurian literature he was more or less a paragon, a great national champion—Malory's portrait of him is inconsistent, and how he became as vicious as Malory represents him, I leave to Arthurian scholars. But his viciousness is important. Malory in translating the *Queste* omitted passages which stressed the opposition of the Grael to the Round Table. He was to the end a hero-worshipper of worldly knights. But Gawaine was one worldly knight, "a passing hot knight of nature", that Malory makes an example of. His chief characteristic is vindictiveness; the vendetta means more to him than chivalry. He is not merciful, he begins his career by killing a lady, and he has other bad blots on his record such as the seduction of the lady Ettard. It is notable that it is he who sets the example to the other knights and starts them on the Quest of the Grael, but this he does out of self-glory, not out of holiness, and it only brings disappointment to himself and injury to the Round Table—"Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have set me in great sorrow. For I have great doubt that my true fellowship shall never meet here more again." Malory concentrates on Gawaine the bitterness which in the original *Queste*, it seems, was directed against the Round Table in general. Gawaine, in his quest, after a tedious lack of adventure, at last, with two others, is attacked by seven knights, whom he and his companions kill. He did

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not know that the slain knights were symbols. A hermit, however, reproves him—"ye have used the most untruest life that ever I heard knight live. *For, certes, had ye not been so wicked as ye are, never had the seven brethren been slain by you and your two fellows*" (italics mine). Obviously a new system of values has been slipped into the story. Up till now it had been a good thing to kill knights. We begin to sympathize with Gawaine, who makes no attempt to amend himself and, when the hermit tells him to do penance, refuses—"for we knights adventurous often suffer great love and pain".

Towards the end of the story Gawaine rises to a kind of brute dignity. He never takes advice and he never forgives. His intractable spirit causes the downfall of Arthur. "So upon the morn there came Sir Gawaine as brim as any boar, with a great spear in his hand. . . ." He makes Lancelot fight with him against his will, and when Lancelot struck him down, and he could not stand, "waved and foined at Sir Lancelot as he lay". Lancelot, of course, was too courteous to strike a wounded man. The contrast here is between the knight-errant *par excellence* and a far more primitive type of hero. Gawaine is like some of the Icelandic heroes. His presence gives the *Morte D'Arthur* a necessary taint of earthiness. But it is typical of the beautiful balance of this book that Gawaine is allowed a death-bed repentance—not repentance in general but repentance for his conduct to Lancelot, to whom while dying he writes a practical and dignified letter.

Malory's minor characters are hardly differentiated, but we never question their reality. They are as real as the Wife of Bath though they are not so realistic. Not till Defoe do we get as strong a feeling of reality from English prose fiction. Caxton's preface, by the way, has been

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taken as evidence that the *Morte D'Arthur* is the first professedly fictitious prose narrative in the language. After Malory's time, of course, many new influences swept away any lingering aversion to non-didactic or unhistoric fiction. But such invented romances as those of Lyly and Sidney show none of the life and solidity of Malory's mere redaction. More important in the history of the English novel were the Elizabethan pamphleteers who anticipated that humour of manners which was later to be so prominent and which, present in Chaucer, was inevitably absent from Malory; Malory shows little humour, though there is a certain folk quality which might be called humour in his story of Beaumains.

In style the Elizabethans produced nothing like Malory's for pure narrative. Lyly's is not, properly, a narrative style at all—"a delicate bayte with a deadly hooke, a sweete Panther with a devouring paunch, a sower poyson in a silver pottle". The pamphleteers made more important innovations, their digressive gusto being the same quality that characterizes so many English novels from Fielding to Thackeray.

The Germaines and lowe Dutch, me thinkes should bee continually kept moyst with the foggie aire and stinking mistes that arise out of their fennie soyle: but as their Countrey is over-flowen with water, so are their heads alwaies over-flowen with wine, and in their bellies they have standing quagmires and bogs of English beere.

Such writing has robustness and clarity, qualities in which the English novel has never been deficient. Malory's style has something else much rarer, a delicate virility which belongs exclusively to narrative.

This quality cannot be analysed. In some places it seems to be attained by understatement. Malory is not a writer whom we feel *writing* all the time as we hear a clock ticking. Witness the first appearance of the Grael,

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a passage which Professor Vinaver has censured as inadequate:

so they went into the castle to take their repast. And anon there came in a dove at a window, and in her mouth there seemed a little censer of gold. And therewithal there was such a savour as all the spicery of the world had been there. And forthwithal there was upon the table all manner of meats and drinks that they could think upon. So came in a damsel passing fair and young, and she bare a vessel of gold betwixt her hands, and thereto the King kneeled devoutly, and said his prayers, and so did all that were there. Then said Sir Launcelot, What may this mean? This is, said the King, the richest thing that any man hath living. And when this thing goeth about, the Round Table shall be broken.

This passage is indeed inadequate in that it totally fails to bring out the Grael's significance. As exposition it fails, as mere statement it is magnificent. M. Jean Cocteau says in a note on his play *Orphée*—"Inutile de dire qu'il n'y a pas un seul symbole dans la pièce. Rien que du langage pauvre, du *poème agi*." It seems to me that Malory attained sometimes this peculiar kind of expression which Cocteau is seeking self-consciously. The philosopher makes a judgement, but the poet and the novelist, on their different planes, make statements. Malory is a master of statement.

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Lyly and Sidney

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By Rose Macaulay

WHEN that pretty patchwork of (mainly) borrowed shreds and pieces called *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wyt*. *Very pleasant for all Gentlemen to reade, and most necessary to remember: wherein are contained the delights that Wyt followeth in his youth by the pleasauntness of Love, and the happynesse he reapeth in age, by the perfectnesse of Wisdome* was published in 1578, it became forthwith a best-seller. It appears that it filled a gap, fed a mouth widely opened for, but not until then supplied with, the delicate and easy fare it offered. Why this dish proved so acceptable, when it was not actually, in any one ingredient, really new (though the particular mixture may have been so), seems wrapped in that cloud of mystery which has, down the ages, enveloped popular taste and the vagaries of literary fashion. Fashions in reading are like thistledown, blown about by winds so light that we can scarcely, even at the moment, see why they blow, only that blow they do. The reading public have always turned from one literary mode to another, without knowing why they turn, only that the time is arrived when turn they must and will. The time had arrived for *Euphues*, as distinct from all the other tales and compilations of tales that were at hand, and the great British novel-reading public, male and female, snapped it up as a bear will bolt a bun (these alliterative animal analogies are, as Lyly and his fellows showed, infectious) and gaped

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for more: which more followed (to slip down even more easily) two years later in *Euphues and his England*. The appetite for the long, sentimental, moralizing tale of genteel life and love, as apart from the historical or chivalric romance, the story from classical history, the *conte*, the *geste*, the book of manners and morals, and the *novelle* that had been translated and imitated from Italian, French and Spanish in their hundreds since the humanist revival had livened polite letters, was at once stimulated and satisfied by these two deft, didactic, artful, sententious, silly, charming, precious, pseudo-scholarly compilations ("compiled by John Lyllie" is the Stationers' Register entry for the *Anatomy*) of which the only features at all new in England were the topical social setting (if setting so airy a no-man's-land can be called), and the length. John Lyly was, even for an Elizabethan, a most accomplished adapter and gleaner—"if I seeme to gleane after an others Cart, for a few eares of corne, or of the Taylors shreds to make me a lyvery, I will not deny", he himself admits, with comprehensible moderation of statement: and the acid Harvey, with less, sneers, "Young Euphues but hatched the eggs his elder friends laid". But one must at least give young Euphues credit for being the hero of the first long novel in English narrative prose about pseudo-contemporary life. Possibly no more is needed to account for his popularity. Add to this that (as the preface to an abridged version published in 1716 puts it) "the subjects on which it treats are the Follies of Young People that are giddy and headstrong", that it is full of sentiment and the didactic moralizing so approved by our ancestors, impassioned dialogues and soliloquies, the parlour conversation games already made so popular by the Italian *novelle*, the constant and amorous devotion of gentlemen, the extremely rapid changes of affection of

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light-minded gentlewomen, and the usual fashionable diatribes against the sins and follies of that sex which has down the ages enjoyed such ill repute; further (and possibly more important, but this is doubtful) that it is written in the very latest and most excessive development of an elegant literary mode, built up of rhythmically balanced antithetical sentences, constant alliteration, neat, methodical-rhetorical argument and response, classical references and similes to lend an air of erudition, continual odd comparisons drawn from the current popular store of natural and unnatural history (or sometimes invented by an author accused of complaining that even the voluminous Pliny was "a barren womb" in such matters), and a number of euphonious tropes and tricks bequeathed long since by Greek rhetoric to English prose and developed down the centuries,—and it is small wonder that gentlemen, ladies and scholars fell for this delightful, stilted, edifying drawing-room romance. "Our Nation are in his debt", wrote Blount the bookseller, in 1632, long after the inevitable reaction, led by sour men of letters, had turned fickle opinion against poor Lyly, "for a new English which hee taught them. *Euphues* and his England began first that language: All our Ladies were then his Schollers; And that Beautie in Court, which could not parley *Euphueisme*, was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French." The disease of "Euphuizing", new, apparently, in conversation, though not in literature ("I cannot stand nosing of candlesticks, or Euphuizing of similies, alla Savoica", said the disagreeable Harvey), took ladies, courtiers and authors alike; and gentlewomen no doubt obeyed the novelist's exhortation to read it while they played with the little dogs on their laps, since "*Euphues* had rather lye shut in a Ladyes casket then open in a Schollers studie". Whatever scholars

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might think of it, whether they agreed with Webbe's eulogy of its fit phrases, pithy sentences, gallant tropes, flowing speech and plain sense, or with William Warner's "to runne on the letter, we runne from the matter: and being over prodigal in similes we become lesse profitable in sentences, and more prolixious to sense", and however rival authors might snip (and even those who aped snipped) it is certain that gentlemen and gentlewomen were charmed, as well with the manner as the matter of this piquant, ridiculous entertainment, which Mézières calls "le plus singulier mélange qui se puisse imaginer, celui d'une certaine sévérité puritaine dans la pensée et d'une coquetterie extrême dans l'expression". Pretty the mixture was, but scarcely singular; puritan moralizing had never lacked from English mediaeval and Renaissance writers, and the style was but carrying an established manner a step further. Indeed, to hear Lyly called "primus artifex verborum" must have been galling for the other careful and exquisite artificers of words who had preceded him; and particularly so for Mr George Pettie, with his *Petite Pallace of Pleasure*, published two years before *Euphues*, whose style Lyly had aped with a fidelity which, if practised today, would scarcely pass even our drowsy and oblivious critics, all too little wont as they are to take notice of stylistic plagiarisms.

Much ink has been spilt over the vexed question of the various sources and ancestries of Euphuism; some confusion perhaps has been caused by insufficient distinction between manner and matter. Half a century of arguing, for instance, about whether Lyly modelled himself on North's and Berners' translations of Guevara's ponderous (and desperately dull) treatise on monarchy and Marcus Aurelius, can surely be summed up by saying that he apparently cribbed some of its topics, its moralizing dis-

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sertations and letters, and here and there a name (though this is not certain); but that to detect a resemblance in verbal style, or in sentence structure, requires the insensitive ear of a foreigner to the English language. Again, the Italian *novelle* (probably via their English translators and imitators) obviously supplied material and close models for many of the conversations, discussions, and those tedious continental drawing-room games in which *questioni d'amore* are asked and answered round the room after meals. Imitation here is so close as to sound, at an Elizabethan supper-party, improbably exotic. An interesting theory was started some years ago¹ that the story was based on some lost play on the popular Prodigal Son theme, of the school of the Dutch Latin drama *Acolastus*. Certainly *Euphues* does, in parts, read rather like a play turned into narrative; some of the names occur also in *Acolastus*, and the fickle heroine is suspiciously like the Prodigal Son's courtesan in polite drawing-room dress. However that may be, the book bulges with unashamed thefts of material, from Pliny, Plutarch, Ovid, Cicero, Caesar and other classical writers, from some of whom whole chunks were lifted; from Erasmus; from numerous English predecessors (including Ascham, who supplied the Platonic word *euphues*), and from the various compilers of tales. William Painter's collection of classical and continental stories, for instance, that storehouse rifled for plots by all Elizabethan dramatists, was at hand whenever a classical anecdote was desired, which was every few pages. And that great depository of natural and mythological facts, Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, with all the bestiaries and treatises of semi-scientific lore derived from it, supplied more than was required, though by no means all that Lyly used, on the enter-

¹ By Professor J. Dover Wilson, in *The Library*, October 1909.

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taining or edifying habits of animals, vegetables and minerals.

But it is not the assembling of borrowed matter, but the remarkable virtuosity shown in the artful development and consistent maintenance of the quite equally borrowed manner, that is the pride of *Euphues*, and its claim on our admiration as a brilliant and elegant *tour de force*. Granted that the style, almost fully formed, existed already in English prose, that its furthest development until then, Pettie's collection of tales, can never have been far from Lyly's desk as he wrote, that he had so soaked himself in it as to reproduce its every trick and sound; granted that he was far more sedulous ape than inventive creator—yet his ingenious use and audacious exaggeration of what he aped, his brilliant, his most tireless consistency in keeping it up, his grasp of its spirit and form, and of the further lengths to which it might be carried, his intricate complications, patternings, symmetries, carefully exquisite balancings and chimings of sound, his ridiculous inventions, do, after all, give some support to his contemporaries' estimate of him as an artificer of genius.

To analyse the style is easy enough; it holds no subtle flavour, no elusive shades. Anyone with patience and an ear could do it, did they care to take the pains; it can be written to rule. There is the carefully level antithesis of clauses, each balancing its fellow in the same sentence, in length, stress and often sound—as "Though thou have eaten the seedes of Rockatte, which breede incontinenzie, yet have I chewed the leafe Cresse, which maintaineth modestie. Though thou beare in thy bosome the hearbe *Araxa* most noisome to virginities, yet have I the stone that groweth in the mounte *Tmolus*, the upholder of chastitie." There is the unceasing alliteration, simple, or

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elaborately cross-patterned through clauses and sentences, and often joined with antithesis; as the simple "Be merry but with modestie; be sober but not too sulloume, be valiaunt but not too venterous. Let thy attyre be comely but not costly . . ."; the more elaborate, "renounce his ladye as most pernicious, or redeem his libertye as most pretious", and "not the carved visarde of a lewde woman, but the incarnate visage of a lascivious wantonne, not the shaddowe of love, but the substaunce of lust", and so on, through all kinds of ingenious patternings, traversings and alternations, until, however pleasantly this trick may titillate the taste, it may yet presently tire the attention. There are, too, rhymes, assonances, repetitions, puns, syllabic and verbal parities, carefully elegant tropes, that stroke the air with a melodious intricacy of echoes and chimes, and are all designed rather to assist the peal of sound than to develop the sense (though it would be quite unfair to class Lyly among Lorenzo's "a many fooles that for a tricksie word defy the matter"). There is the characteristic double comparative—"Naples, a place of more pleasure then profite, and yet of more profite then pietie"—which seems to be the one among Lyly's mannerisms least derived. Straight from Pettie, on the other hand, is the declamatory soliloquizing argument and response in which Euphues and all his acquaintances indulge when left alone even for a moment, and particularly when (as is their normal condition) they are "frying in the flames of love". "I, but *Euphues* gave the onset: I, but *Lucilla* gave the occasion: I, but *Euphues* first brake his minde: I, but *Lucilla* first bewrayed hir meaning" . . . thus these distraught beings will go on to themselves, seldom arriving at any decision in the end. But probably the most frequent and familiar of Euphuisms is that parodied and popularized by Falstaff in "For though the Camomile,

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the more it is troden, the faster it grows, yet Youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it weares". Lyly has "though the Camomill, the more it is trodden and pressed downe, the more it spreadeth, yet the violet, the ofner it is handled and touched, the sooner it withereth and decayeth", and Pettie, "the herb camomile, the more it is trodden downe, the more it spreadeth abroad", and where Pettie got it from may be known, but I do not know it, nor yet if it be true. As to truth, Lyly, anyhow, did not trouble himself unduly. In fact, in this matter of

Talking of Stones, Stars, Plants, of Fishes, Flies,
Playing with words, and idle Similies,

Lyly went in with zest for fabulous lore, either out of Pliny and its other collectors, or, when these proved too barren a womb, out (apparently) of his own head. It was this bright, attractive, overworked trick that most pleased or annoyed his contemporaries, that has been more aped, parodied, admired, complained of, than any other of Lyly's preciosities. "Now for similitudes, in certain printed discourses," grumbled the sensible Sidney, "I thinke all Herbarists, all stories of Beasts, Foules and Fishes, are rifled up, that they come in multitudes, to waite upon any of our conceits; which certainly is as absurd a surfet to the eares, as is possible . . . a most tedious prattling." Prattling it may be; perhaps even "a Curtizan-like painted affectation", and to some intelligent minds of all periods very tedious. But many Elizabethan readers, as most mediaeval ones, and some today, read with edified pleasure that "the fish *Scolopidus* in the flood *Araris* at the waxinge of the Moone is as white as the driven snow, and at the wayning as blacke as the burnt coale", even though the fish's resemblance to the faithless friend to whom it was compared may not strike them. All the so peculiar

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properties and actions of the natural and the mythological world were familiar friends to readers reared from the Middle Ages on imaginative bestiaries, herbals and books of strange science. In using the odd habits of animals and plants to point a moral and adorn a tale, Lyly was well in the line of literature. He might have challenged Sidney and his "tedious prattling" with "like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so pants my soul after thee", or with the continual far-fetched analogies of the Greek and Latin poets. Still, as with his other ornaments of style, Lyly no doubt overdid it a little, "like those Indians, not content to weare eare-rings at the fit and naturall place of the eares, but they will thrust jewels through their nose and lippes, because they will be sure to be fine".

Having burnished up and assumed his style, no doubt with the easy adoption with which fashionable contemporary habits are usually slipped on, Lyly had but to choose a felicitous path to walk abroad in it, that he might display it and himself to the best advantage of both. Dig up a story from somewhere, at home or abroad, old or new, dress and garnish it in some old or new way, add your own sauce, and serve: that was the Elizabethan recipe for producing drama and prose fiction for a public seldom critical so long as you entertained them somehow. A hundred tales from all lands and ages were ready for use by any new teller, and no questions asked. But Lyly thought to improve on Painter and Pettie and Fenton and Gascoigne and the rest, by adapting and fusing several stock plots and treatises into one long moralizing tale of high-class modern life. Rightly he thought that, served with the pretty sauce of the fashionable style he had made his own, such a book would go down extremely well. So he took a young gentleman of Athens, rich, comely and sharp of wit, and deposited him in a few lines in

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Naples, that dissolute city over which all good Englishmen shook their heads. He perhaps believed himself able, when he blithely began, "There dwelt in *Athens* a young gentleman", to keep up the young gentleman's adventures for more pages than proved possible. He was twenty-four; this was his first book; and he was probably still unaware of the novelist's great difficulty, which is to keep it up, or of his own lack of the inventive power essential for this. Did he know that he would sadly soon run through his tale, and fall to padding and puffing it out with letters and moral dissertations after famous models? Perhaps he did not care; perhaps he thought it the correct and fashionable way (as, indeed, it was), and that moral discourses might show off his style as well as narrative and conversation.

Be that as it may, and however he expected to end, he began lustily, with a gay burgeoning of all his brave rhetorical flowers; and one sees at once what fun *Euphues* must have been to write, until, before the end, it began to wilt a little. With what relish the moral young author describes his hero's gay life in Naples, where he went what is now called the pace, yet kept his head. How long-winded a model for Polonius is the good old gentleman who takes him to task for his folly, in Euphuistic periods which yet fail to impress Euphues, for he snubs the good old gentleman at immense length and goes off to a party. A pulsing drama follows, in brief outline (for Lyly, so prodigal of words in dialogue, in edifying discourse, or curious analogy, never seems at home in narrative, scampers through it awkwardly, and with a swiftness rather disconcerting to those trained to expect development of character or intricacies of plot to take their time). All in no time, Euphues makes a bosom friend, with the significant name Philautus, who takes him to sup with his

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young lady, Lucilla, all lily and vermillion cheeks (probably painted), fluent Euphuistic conversation, and fickleness; and very naturally "this gallant gyrl, more faire then fortunate, and yet more fortunate then faithfull", reacts to this not unprecedented situation in the usual manner, and she and Euphues are, by the end of supper, frying in the flames of ill-suppressed love. With infinite poverty of thought and wealth of diction, ingenuousness of narrative and ingenuity of narration, the story runs its time-honoured course, amid anguished soliloquies, impassioned dialogues, a cloud of witnesses summoned every page or two from classical history, and a whole bestiary of foxes, crocodiles, geese, ostriches, toads, dragons, weasels, doves, and those other animals whose behaviour is so instructive to humanity. The amiable and feckless Philautus is abominably treated by his lady and by Euphues, who, whenever we see him emerging from the rhythmical and ordered waves of the sea of language in which he so diligently swims, shows as a completely disagreeable young man, priggish, selfish, and unscrupulous even for an Athenian. Finally Lucilla ends the crisis by conceiving another of her sudden passions, this time for one Curio, a gentleman of little wealth and less wit, and Euphues, after much railing against the sex, makes it up with the forgiving Philautus and leaves for Greece, sending his friend a letter of advice against love and women adapted from Ovid. Being by this time turned very Richardson, very Grandison, he now embarks on a career of edification and miscellaneous good advice, translating Plutarch on education and passing it off as his, with some censorious comments on the University of Athens thrown in to spite Oxford. He then becomes Public Reader in Philosophy in Athens University, abandons the pagan classics, and takes to the exclusive study of the Bible, remarking, "Oh

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I would gentlemen would some times sequester themselves from their own delights, and employ their wits in searching these heavenly and divine misteries". It is quite natural that he should after this embark on a long and victorious debate with an atheist, who thanks him for making "of an heathenly Pagan a heavenly Protestant". The book ends in a tail of didactic and imitative letters, in which we learn that Philautus is living in vice and that Lucilla has died of it.

So ends this idiotic story, this carefully wrought, richly adorned rhetorical novel; in which each sentence has balance, style and design, and the whole book is a haphazard, undesigned jumble. It remained to preface it with a tongue-in-the-cheek dedication apologizing for the bareness of the style, which would "nothing delight the dayntie eare of the curious sifter", but "a naked tale doth most truely set foorth the naked truth".

Two years later the bald and austere tale-teller produced his sequel, *Euphues and his England*, a novel of English drawing-room life, that might, for any relation it can ever have borne to English drawing-rooms, as well have been written in Italy or Greece. Like the *Anatomy*, it is a mirror of purely literary reflections, as mannered, as plagiaristic, as edifying, as remote from life. The characters still speak in neat periods; even when sea-sick they keep up their *alto estile* bravely throughout. Euphues emerges from his Readership to conduct Philautus to England, a land which is, he thinks, the model of virtue and loveliness to all Europe. His years of scriptural study have not improved him; he is consistently disagreeable to his friend, breaks incessantly into tedious tales and cribbed chunks of history and description, quarrels on the slightest cause; he is throughout more priggish than pious, and yet more pious than pleasant, and interminably platitudinous

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and prolix. Yet he remains readable, for he almost unfailingly keeps firm control of his euphonious and rhythmic style; though, like the serpent, the more she tapers toward her tail, the more loosely she lashes at large, so this tale, the closer it creeps to its close, the more licence Lyly allows it; and some parts of the letters at the end are almost simple in manner. Though the flattery of the Virgin Queen, however excited in sentiment and fulsome in expression, retains its verbal balance with a creditable virtuosity and coolness which no doubt delighted that literary prince.

After his excursion into the intricacies of English social and amorous life, where he leaves Philautus permanently entangled, Euphues retires to a life of solitary musing in a mountain, and his great gift of words is so at last silenced. It occurs to one that he has not, throughout two novels of eloquent conversation, uttered a single natural or lifelike remark. Indeed, the only such remark in the two books seems that of Philautus when his friend was stunning him with talk while he was sea-sick—

In fayth *Euphues* thou hast told a long tale, the beginning I have forgotten, the middle I understand not, and the end hangeth not together. . . . I cannot brook these Seas, which provoke my stomach sore . . . it wer best for me to take a nap.

This lapse from literaryism starts speculation. What kind of novel could Lyly have written, had he set out to ape life instead of literature? Had he, instead of making Fidus, the old bee-keeper, regale the travellers with pages from Pliny on bees and with the story of his youth cribbed from an Italian *novella*, drawn a real Elizabethan countryman, with real talk on bees and on life, delivered in racy Kentish idiom. . . . Had he, instead of introducing his young foreigners into a drawing-room of puppets with Latin names who occupied themselves eternally with

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Italian *questioni d'amore*, attempted to draw a set of real Elizabethan gentlewomen, their discussions, play, work and gossipings. . . . A tantalizing thought. Probably Lyly had as yet no art to do it with; at twenty-five, he could copy literature, but not life; anyhow, he had no notion of doing so odd and ungentle a thing in a novel for the drawing-room, though he would do it in a play for the groundlings. Had he, or another, used narrative prose for such a purpose, the novel might have started on a fine brisk race with the drama; and by the time it reached Defoe, who knows what it might have been doing? What characters in a Caroline novel, for instance, such sturdy Buckinghamshire gentry as the Verneys would have made! But it was not to be. The English gentry had to wait long for their place in the English novel. *Euphues*, for all its many imitators, parodists, adapters, plunderers, and for all its tremendous temporary effect on literary and dramatic style, had, and could have, no permanent effect on the stuff of fiction; it was but another brilliant experiment in the artful use of language. As such, we salute it with the honours due to so brave a piece of dandyism and to a linguistic model which helped to mould Shakespeare's prose, and for the novel of English manners (as distinguished from manner) wait for Deloney and his lusty low-lifers.

And those were, after all, bad manners, low, common, impolite, tavern manners. They had no effect on the learned and the polite, who wrote for polite readers; they did not start a literary fashion. It is unfortunate, but one must face it, that literary fashions are practically always started by the wrong people, people who are all very well in their own books, but have the worst effect in the world on the books of other people. Lyly was of these. But a far worse influence was to follow him. Perhaps no

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writer of high literary gifts has ever done such long damage to literature and to literary taste and fashion as did Sir Philip Sidney when he wrote his *Arcadia*. That tedious and prolix chivalric-pastoral romance, after Spanish and Italian models that even then were outmoded, that hotch-potch of intricate disguisings, noble escapades, exalted sentiments, lofty piety, chivalric combats, handsome, shadowy, virtuous and amatorious ladies and gentlemen, tournaments, pastoral musings, inconsequent adventures, written in richly ornamental and conscious poet's prose, which, in reaction possibly to Lyly's neat, precise, formal rhythms, rambles and cascades all over the place, was not really a native English product, but was strangely dear to the romantic and poetic English heart. Lyly's shapely quiddities and rhetorical tricks might appeal to a sophisticated reading public; Sidney's knightly, adventurous and shapeless romance appealed to everyone who liked a novel of sentiment and heroic action. "Euphues I read when I was a little ape in Cambridge", wrote Nash, "and I thought it was *ipse ille*: it may be excellent good still for aught I know. . . ." The little apes in Cambridge may have been less taken by the less smart and modish *Arcadia*; it is not such good fun, it is more traditional, and little apes do not always desire, as Milton did, to steep themselves in heroic romance. But, like *Euphues*, the *Arcadia*, circulated in manuscript from 1580 on, and published posthumously ten years later, after being (awe-inspiring thought) re-written from the beginning up to two-thirds of the way through, took the fancy of the general and the literary by storm. Few of the strange phenomena which make the history of literary taste so interesting a study emphasize with such sharpness the gulf which divides us from our reading ancestors as does the fact that they all read and delighted in the *Arcadia*.

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Not merely read *in it*, as we do, for its lovely passages, its verbal imagery, the incidental verses it enshrines, but read it through for the story, following clearly (one supposes) the intricate adventures and intrigues of these so shadowy yet active beings who so closely resemble one another in deed, word and sentiment. *Euphues* showed a rudimentary but distinct sense of character, even though its people all talk in the same manner; Sidney showed none. A poet of nearly the first rank, a prose writer of admirable vigour and clarity, a literary critic of insight, he was, despite his linguistic beauty, a dull, even a disastrous novelist. One cannot read the *Arcadia* without giving thanks that *Astrophel and Stella* is in verse.

How much such a notable and admired book, by such a distinguished popular hero, did in the way of deflecting prose fiction further along the wrong track that it practically always pursues, may be seen in the hosts of imitators that followed it. Arcadianism almost eclipsed the already waning star of Euphuism: and Drayton rather spitefully rejoiced that "the noble Sidney . . . did first reduce our tongue from Lillie's writing then in use", a writing which he, in the hey-day of reaction, regarded merely as "ridiculous tricks". Now that the quarrelling and fashions of the rival schools have died down, there are probably few who do not prefer Lyly's stilted and precise shapeliness and his particular bag of tricks, to Sidney's stilted and rambling formlessness and drowsy periods. Sidney could have learnt a lesson from the voyager writers, who could evoke a picture with a phrase, whose narrative prose moves not only with the lovely and cadenced rhythms of the sea, but with the sea's salt and tang. The *Arcadia* is not a prose poem, for it lacks the sharp imagination, the concentrated feeling, the clear vision of poetry; it is only a fine poet's ill-con-

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ceived novel: while *Euphues* is the entertaining, polite, literary exercise of a clever young wit who knew that the drama was the proper medium for expressing anything beyond moral edification, genteel love intrigues and an elegant style. Neither book was, or was intended to be, life at first hand.

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Defoe

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THE eighteenth century revival has been something more than a fashion. There was a rediscovery of intellectual and moral sympathies which the nineteenth century had annulled; there was a vague feeling of kinship with another pre-revolutionary time; and there was the nostalgia for the security and the plain, rational formality of the Augustans. Our characteristic crisis today is a crisis of style; and whereas some followed Joyce into verbal experiment, those in search of the refuge of an approved manner were glad to turn to the elegant plain statement of the eighteenth century.

Style being the man, you cannot borrow one without first becoming the other. This was particularly difficult when Defoe was the model, for that "homely plain writing" which Defoe declared was his infirmity is full of traps. Unique in his own time, plain but never elegant, Defoe had the devious complexity of a nature whose simplicity and straightforwardness were highly disingenuous. How far simplicity is the result of art and how far of artlessness is always impossible to say; but when we admire the hot-house perfection of the modern Defoe hybrid, we have to protest that Defoe was never as perfect as this. He is a weed in English literature, a writer as wiry and prolific as couch grass, growing anyhow and essentially inimitable. If the style of Defoe, his manner as a story-teller, is his main interest for the con-

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temporary novelist, it is rather from the historical point of view. Here we may reflect upon certain similarities between Defoe's position at the beginning of the modern novel—of which he has been called the father—and ours at what is possibly the end of its development; for we see him appearing in just such a crisis of style as we are facing today.

In a sense to call Defoe a novelist at all is to misunderstand him. He is the journalist, the superb special correspondent, the writer of fictitious biography, standing apart from men like Fielding and Richardson, and adding something startlingly new to the tradition which had come through Chaucer, Nashe, Bunyan and those imitators of the French who had culminated in his earlier contemporary, Mrs Aphra Behn. The English tradition is mongrel and individual. In Nashe we get a hint of what a successor like Defoe might do. There had also been a transfusion of Spanish blood into the English stream; and with translations of Cervantes and Lazarillo de Tormes on their fathers' tables, the young English writers were ready to make what they could of the picaresque in prose now that the drama was dead. It would be interesting to know what Spanish writers Defoe read on his business journeys to Spain.

A study of Defoe's literary forbears is less suggestive than an examination of the social environment and the changes in it which produced him. A crisis in style is the expression of a change in political and social conditions. If neither Defoe nor any of his contemporaries could have written in the manner of their predecessors, it was because society had been transformed. The Civil War and the Restoration had made a permanent break with the past which the accession of William of Orange and Anne confirmed. Puritan, middle-class Protestantism

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had succeeded although, in the peculiar English way, it had become absorbed into the English aristocratic tradition. The effect of this upon literature has been described with his admirable epigrammatic orderliness by Taine:

Chivalrous manners had been blotted out, carrying with them the poetical and picturesque drama. Monarchical manners had been blotted out, carrying with them the witty and licentious drama. Citizen manners had been established, bringing with them domestic and practical reading.

"Domestic and practical"—the impulse is clear; it is to simplicity and realism; and, because of the great increase of the reading public, to a literature not written for the learned and the elaborated tastes of the initiate but for the entertainment of the literate multitude. The settlement of the dynastic question had taken from journalism its chief subject. It was necessary to discover new fields. The drawing-room needed matter for conversation which had been monopolized by the coffee-house; and *The Spectator*, *The Tatler* and the less polite *Mist's and Applebee's* appeared for the diversion of what were called "polite ladies". The foundation of the Royal Society by Charles II in 1662, three years after the birth of Defoe, was a sign of the change, for a simple style was required in its scientific publications: just as the demand of the B.B.C. for simple language in its talks arises from the difficulties of scientific language and the appearance of a new public where even the learned are inexperienced outside their speciality.

The resemblance in the conditions which Defoe found ready for exploitation—for he was an exploiter above all—with the conditions facing the present-day novelist who has two hundred years of tradition behind him, is curious. The wishes, prejudices and concerns of a newly-made class had become vocal, and we are in the midst of a similar transformation now.

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Our style crisis is the modern class crisis, and while tradition tends to absorb change in England, in America the younger naturalistic writers of the Hemingway type have turned not only to "homely plain writing", but to the common man's way of telling a story, to his repetitions, his simplified view of life, his either limited or brutalized sensibility—cf. Mr Wyndham Lewis's "dumb ox"—and his main-chance philosophy. Like Defoe, such writers are reporters and collectors of evidence; like him, they stand outside literary tradition;—they are indeed oral rather than literary—like him, as far as the novel or some new literary form is concerned, they may be signposts, points of departure. They crank up their lorries outside the psychological retreats of the contemporary novel, as Defoe's "Kitchen reading"—Charles Lamb's phrase—drowned the talk of the drawing-room and the sighs of the divan in the work of Mrs Aphra Behn. Pursuing the speculation to the end, one finds, however, one most important difference; the vitality of Defoe is vastly greater than the vitality of this American truckman literature. The Americans are "dumb oxen". Their sophistication and pseudo-toughness is an inverted sentimentality. Their realism is defensive. There is none of the "dumb ox" in Defoe; his characters are not men to whom—in Mr Wyndham Lewis's phrase—things are done, but dull men and women who go forth to do. The main distinction is to be found in the matter of religious belief. Here the Americans are spiritually tired; whereas the uniqueness and force of Defoe are fed by his narrow, tradesman non-conformity. The Puritanism which had been impure in Milton and imaginative in Bunyan, had become with Defoe a conventional and aggressive belief in work and action. It is the absence of piety which makes modern pastiche of Defoe by English writers, an incidental re-

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finement rather than an important trend in English letters.

Defoe has frequently spoken of the manner of writing he introduced. In *A Journal of the Plague Year*, he writes: "My memorandum of these things relate rather to take notice only of the fact, and mention that it was so". The key to the art of Defoe, as in all story-telling among common men, is in the reinforcing final phrase. The standard realist contents himself with blunt statement of the fact, the first part of Defoe's method; whereas the second part, foreshadowing Henry James's argument that what is merely stated is not presented, converts a statement of fact into a statement of art. Almost every sentence of Defoe's fiction is sealed by the circumstantial. There is such gusto in the habit that he is for ever seeking opportunities to indulge it, saying the most careless and unlikely things in order more ingeniously to test his skill in making everything credible. It is the habit of the born and congenital liar, the old lag impenetrably stocked with alibis, the spy who has noted every inch of the ground, every movement of the population, as well as the habit of the new, fact-hunting, scientific mind. Defoe will even run to the great risk of correcting himself, and with most striking success. There is a good example of this in the *Plague Journal*, a perfect example of the idiosyncrasies of popular story-telling and all the more convincing for that:

There was nobody, as I could perceive at first, in the churchyard or going into it, but the buriers and the fellow that drove the cart, or rather led the horse and cart. . . .

The man is in the driver's seat. Then the lens is given another twist, the picture is corrected and the man leading. The correction increases our faith in the narrator by

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increasing our knowledge of him—he is a conscientious man aware of the tricks of memory—and makes us look twice. Vividness is doubled. Again, on another page, pointing out that the weather prophecies of the astrologers were wrong—the Defoe who wrote a news-story describing how an island had blown up in the Pacific, applied a cool mind to other people's lies—there is this passage:

... for we had no drouhty season, but in the beginning of the year a hard frost, which lasted from December almost to March, and after that moderate weather, rather warm than hot, with refreshing winds, and, in short, very seasonable weather, and also several very great rains.

This, with its subtle qualifications, its lack of directness, its musical, cunning, casual air, is one of the best descriptions of the English climate our literature has. To call such a manner "homely" is to underrate and misunderstand it. It is summary and economical. We have had dozens of novelists who have packed their work with homely detail and it lies on the page, stacked and unassimilated like unsold goods in a warehouse. There is no other English writer who could have written that laconic note on the fate of Crusoe's companions: "As for them I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their hats, one cap, and two shoes that were not fellows". The genius is in the particularity of the statement and in the final clinching of the last phrase. What is romance to us was real life to Crusoe. To substantiate the romantic by showing its domestic condition, was Defoe's aim. Yet this alone would not give his verisimilitude its peculiar delight. Our pleasure comes also from the original ordinariness of the narrator's character. The character is always the same, whether it is Moll Flanders, the saddler, Crusoe or Roxana, the sublimely fortunate mistress; and we are engrossed because

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it is the character of the cunning, resourceful, shrewd side of human nature, average and decent, which goes about its daily business, and which is the obverse of our emotional, fantasy-making life. Defoe's people are not the leisured, or rather they are not shown in their leisured moments. Their adventures are part of their daily bread. They are workers and schemers and there is no harder work than petty crime or domestic management. They have no time to refine upon their emotions and therefore the capacity is atrophied. They are the busy products of revolution. Crusoe works every day on his island without question, glad that it gives him little or no time to feel deeply or to think. When he does feel deeply the feeling is the hysterical, devil-haunted feeling of the inhibited man; when he is tempted to think, thought is automatic. Conventional piety does the job for him. And so that "seasonable weather" of the *Plague Journal* is the weather merely noticed and unconsciously absorbed into men and women who are occupied. It is no Hardy absolute. To the hopes, fears and passions of people it is an adjacent diversion to which they sometimes turn a preoccupied and almost unseeing eye.

All the time our eyes are looking at a world which the mind's eye immediately distorts. We walk down a street, we enter a room, we become part of a drama, and the mind turns this seeing and hearing into a stage play of jingles, associations, memories, wishes, fears and fantasies; we become to ourselves, itinerant puppet shows. The realism of Defoe breaks into this private dream world and reminds us of our public reality. We are citizens and taxpayers. We cease to be romantic, absolute centres, and become creatures relative to one another in the business of survival, delighted by the originality of an author who can surprise us with the commonplace of

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our circumstance. And so with events and things. The weather, the plague, shipwreck, love, money, bread and death are not the absolutes of romantic narrative but exist through people and because of them. We contract, with relief, to our unpretentious public size, and become part of Defoe's world, because the calculations of his characters are ours. It is necessary to be resourceful, to think of money and public opinion in order to live; it is inevitable even to think involuntarily, with mingled self-interest and panic, of the Deity.

Crusoe and Moll Flanders are not merely observers as they are in many novels written in the first person, but whole people in the round, moving on our level; they act first and moralize later, the tradesman followed by the missionary; and if to make calculation the lowest common denominator of human nature is not the most profound psychology, it has the advantage of putting money into the purses of fictitious characters who are usually left to live on air. The very meanness of the tradesman mind thus becomes translated into literary virtue; and since his religion was a fixed thing, a pocket morality of which the Bible was the ready-reckoner, Defoe was never tempted to the immense, familiar detail of the spiritual obvious which internal analysis provides, but was left free to exploit the less familiar detail of the external world. We are all specialists in ourselves; it is refreshing to turn to the common man in ourselves who hardly knows what spiritual curiosity is.

Defoe's "common-man-and-plain-homely-writing" view of life has cost him his moral reputation. His own defence against the cruder of these attacks is the stock one of certain novelists, and it is such a poor one that he is inevitably accused of hypocrisy. Defoe was one of those honest liars about whom it is impossible to make up one's

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mind, and he himself can hardly have known when he was honest and when dishonest. He took the obvious line of saying that the attractive, vicious reading of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* was written to warn the reader against like temptation; and while I have no doubt this was sincerely said, it is improbable that Defoe ever paused to consider whether this was in truth his primary object or whether his books were likely to have this effect. He was too complex a person to say openly that he considered the question irrelevant. The dominating motive of the complete tradesman is success in his trade, the triumph of the hard work of God-fearing individualism; and to the boasting, prolific, vital and ingenious figure of Defoe, popular success with a touch of theatrical publicity in it was very dear. He is, in this, the forerunner of the modern Sunday newspaper proprietor who exploits the vice of the day by rousing the crudest and most melodramatic moral prejudices of the public, and one has yet to meet the man who can do this with his tongue in his cheek. Those crude moral prejudices must be in the exploiter first. The viciousness of Defoe—if we regard him as a moral character—lay, as Hazlitt rather intolerantly discerned, in his moral and religious views which ruled out half of life, rather than in his excellent stories of larceny and whoredom. In this respect, the fact that *Moll* and *Roxana* do not strike one as being wicked women, but good-hearted and wholesome creatures—although Defoe tells us that heaven will pour upon them all the agonies of punishment and remorse—must count against him.

An examination of the morals of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, of Colonel Jack and Captain Singleton, reveals the complexity of the puritan mind, the intellectual cat's cradle it makes of the natural man. Defoe is tolerant.

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None of his characters scheme and sin out of congenital viciousness, but are the victims of circumstance. Defoe fancied himself as a social reformer. He suffered in the struggle for survival and reform seemed to him as much a question of intelligence, tolerance and adventure as of justice. Intelligence and the instinct of adventure are characteristic of him, and it is really these qualities in them which make us admire Roxana and Moll. In the long run they come out on top, amid the injustices of society and the misfortunes of life, because of their gambling instinct and their brains, and redeem their faults by an average decency. "So-and-so", I remember saying to a Spanish business man, "is a dishonest rogue." "Yes", replied the Spaniard. "He is very intelligent." And even when Moll Flanders is boasting of the ingenuity she used to rob a child in the Mall, we feel chiefly that Moll was a very intelligent woman, that her wish to repair her fortunes, so injured by circumstances over which she had no control, is natural and praiseworthy, and that she was getting her own back on a society which had swindled her and usually had the law to protect it. And one is not being sentimental over a thief; Defoe saves us from that by limiting our admiration to her resourcefulness and dexterity. In Roxana intelligence again attracts us. Of course she is a selfish woman and a gold digger, but it strikes us rather more that she is a prudent, practical woman of affairs, and not seriously avaricious. It is significant that Defoe makes her attribute her "bad" life to marrying a fool.

These hard women are not sinister enough to be the cautionary figures which Defoe, a not very profound man and limited in his muddled religious views, may have thought to make them. If he had not a very high sense of the good, he had no very deep sense of the evil either.

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He had a working morality. Like many men who have a low opinion of women, he was evidently fascinated by the streak of good-natured folly and vanity which is blended with their almost Shavian economic prudence, in the women he observed. They were good Protestant independent women. The host of "brave boys" to which these high-spirited ladies gave easy, illegitimate birth had mothers of character. To the most romantic lady of Defoe's time, pregnancy must have been a matter of routine, and Defoe's women are all attractive for having passed out of the cow state into something like emancipation. The devotion of Amy to Roxana is human, though it has a sinister end—it is agreeable to know that Defoe never said "Yes" or "No" to the question "Did Amy murder Roxana's inconvenient daughter?", leaving her something of the benefit of the doubt—and the passage which describes how Roxana handed her lover over to Amy for the night, in order to make Amy a "whore" like *herself and so be at ease in her own house*, is an excellent piece of psychology which endears both women to us, though we may not commend their conduct.

Defoe attacks his own nonconformist conscience in these books, correcting it with tolerance, and once again returning to nonconformity. He is reacting against his own tendencies. In the midst of faction he is pleading for tolerance and common sense; obtaining these, self-torture begins again and once more he spoils the equilibrium. In his work this self-torture becomes the spirit of adventure, as we have already seen; and one has only to turn to the early pages of the second part of *Robinson Crusoe* to find adventure realistically described as the self-torture which Defoe, fervent liar and dissenter, must have known it to be. I don't think it is running into the trap

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of reading more into a pure story-teller than is justified when one sees in Crusoe's return and the sudden terrifying desire for adventure rising once more to disturb his marriage, some disguised autobiographical fragment. This craving for self-torture and solitude he meets with all the resources of religion. His wife finally yields to him, but—and this is typical—he does not go until circumstance, in the shape of his wife's death, leaves him free. In other words—tolerance, no extreme measures. His religion is at the mercy of circumstance; he is the adaptable tolerant man who faces nothing but compounds with his devil by forgetting him and gets on with his work.

This wait for circumstance, with the compromise it involves, takes all dramatic value from Crusoe's struggle against impulse, whatever the gain to realism may be; and to my mind, indicates why the second part of *Robinson Crusoe* is difficult to read, why indeed one begins Defoe with gusto and finds him monotonous after a hundred pages. It is not only that Defoe has but one character and that one himself: the shrewd citizen multiplied. The real trouble is that circumstance swarms upon his books and breaks up the bigger shapes of the narrative into smaller ones, all the same size, all ingeniously and inventively managed, but one taking the value from its neighbour. He is for ever qualifying and levelling. Adventure is put into the laboratory. He had little sense of an artistic whole, —*Robinson Crusoe* and the *Plague Journal* are the only books which come near to being works of art as distinct from works of ingenuity, because their central situations are transcendently dramatic.

The idea of Crusoe was larger than any which Defoe subsequently handled because Crusoe is a universal character. He is Defoe in *excelsis*. He is the prototype

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of the men of the centuries of discovery; and his adventure is an eternal wish. The book is unique. It was Defoe's first work of fiction, and this is a strong reason for thinking that some hardly conscious autobiography went into it. I do not mean that we should believe the tale that it was an allegory about "one Daniel Defoe alone on the desert island of Great Britain", for Defoe himself has cast a strong doubt upon that belief, by pocketing it for its publicity value. But I think the reason why this was the first theme to call forth Defoe's powers as a writer of fiction lies in the fact that it was the theme of solitude—the solitude of an intensely original and circumscribed man. It was typical of Defoe, however, not to realize or attempt the full significance of his subject and to stick to evidence. His mind was scientific. Today he would probably be engaged upon some fantastic scientific leg-pull. Crusoe to him was the unique opportunity, a chance of getting "a story" out of Alexander Selkirk, the sublime news story; and one reads it now, marvelling at its originality and its amazing invention; but even more astounded by its preposterous chronology and the possibilities undeveloped. Length and breadth Defoe could always manage; depth or altitude are untouched by him. Everything is circumstantial, reduced to evidence. Once more he has surprised our wish-world with a greyer thing which as far as externals are concerned looks like reality. An Englishman on a desert island *would*, in all probability, behave as Crusoe did. He is the one universal character in fiction one would loath to meet, the man in the street raised to the *n*th power of monstrous efficiency, a monumental dullard who stops himself from thinking by drudgery. He is the artisan and gadget inventor in apotheosis, the archetype of Self Help, the knowing product of class emancipation,

DEFOE

building civilization anew no doubt, but one who would not rest until he had turned the Garden of Eden into another Golders Green. It would not surprise one to hear that this ingenious and wily Stalin of the year 1719 had been canonized in Soviet Russia. A Five-Year Plan could have no better worker.

Defoe was sixty when he wrote *Crusoe* and he had published other books in that year. Whether they had been written before and hoarded is not known; but it seems likely that they had, for the stream of pamphlets and articles never ceased. Three years after *Crusoe*, three other books appeared in one year, two of them of Defoe's first order: *Moll Flanders* and the *Plague Journal*. It is hard to believe that they could have been so quickly produced; on the other hand Defoe had an eye to the market, and the *Plague Journal* shows signs of improvisation. When, for example, the narrator meets the old man in the burial-ground at night and after sending him away decides to follow him, one can almost see the machinery of invention at work.

A double-faced hammer is popularly called a Wesleyan in the north of England; and a man with as much on his conscience as Defoe had put on his, needed all his resources. He is the greatest liar in English letters. He was not content with the fantastic which does not expect belief. His was the complete lie, the lie circumstantial, prolific of evidence. The condition of journalism at the time gave a blessing and an impetus to his temperament, for lacking special correspondents, papers had to invent the news and make it sound true, in contrast with the modern practice of sending men to get the news and make it sound ridiculous. The gifts and originality of Defoe could not have found a more favourable climate. As Minto, one of his biographers, says:

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The mere fact that at the end of ten years of secret service under successive governments, and in spite of widespread opinion of his untrustworthiness, he was able to pass himself off for ten years more as a Tory with the Tories and with the Whig governments as a loyal servant, is a proof of sustained ingenuity of invention greater than many volumes of fiction.

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DAVID GARNETT

Richardson, Fielding and Smollett

RICHARDSON, FIELDING AND SMOLLETT

By David Garnett

BEFORE considering the good qualities of a really great writer it is often well to sum up his bad ones; in contrasting Richardson and Fielding this is particularly helpful, since the fact that they were writing at the same time about the same manners and that they are both called the fathers of the English novel, may prevent the modern reader from realizing the immense, almost unbridgeable gulf between them.

I do not think that it is too partial to say that Richardson's worst faults come, not from limitations in him, but from the circumstances in which he began to write fiction at the age of fifty. Up till that time he had been an industrious little London printer who gradually rose to be comfortably well off and then Master of the Stationers' Company. He was a great hand at compiling indexes and collecting copy-book maxims and would never have written a line of fiction if it had not been for his lifelong preoccupation with women, of whom he had an extraordinary instinctive understanding and by dozens of whom he was chosen as a confidant and adviser. With these females he maintained an unceasing and enormous correspondence which must have accustomed him to a habit of fluent rapid writing, of not always saying quite what he meant, but letting his meaning slip out

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through the outward mask of pleasant propriety and good feeling.

One of the chief objects of Richardson's life was to be a respected member of society; he was therefore always a champion of religion, of social subordination and of propriety in conduct, and he was anxious to acquire the reputation of a moralist. Even in his own day his morality seemed to be purely a matter of obeying the conventions, and today he seems to us to have no other ethical standards. Thus his notions of right and wrong are priggish and highfalutin in expression and consist merely in the proper observance of certain taboos. A great part of his novels is given up to their elaboration; these ethical ideas (if one can call them such) make up, but seldom spoil, his story or warp the development of his characters as happens often enough in greater masters, such as Tolstoy, who chose the novel partly to preach his own view of morals. *Clarissa* is not a living woman like *Anna Karenina*, but she is always consistent; *Anna*, betrayed by her author, is untrue to herself.

At the age of fifty this lower middle-class little man was urged on by some of his friends in the book trade to market his talents as a letter writer and adviser of women, and embarked upon a novel written in a series of letters revealing the situation of a servant girl whose employer does everything in his power to seduce her, but who resists his abominable attempts until she finally reaps the extraordinary reward of being honoured by his hand in marriage, though he is infinitely above her in station. Such a subject is, of course, of almost universal practical interest to young women, and the plot of *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* will no doubt continue to provide best-sellers so long as it is possible for women to improve their position by marriage—that is, for ever. Variations upon the

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theme by Harold Bell Wright, in which the chief characters are often a millionaire and his stenographer, have sold several millions of copies during the last few decades.

Like its imitators, *Pamela* was a terrific success and Richardson was encouraged to proceed as author. In *Clarissa, or the history of a Young Lady*, the heroine is a member of the upper classes, persecuted and outrageously ill-used by her family, who are bent upon forcing her against her inclination, and against impartial and reasonable judgements, into marriage with a disgusting Mr Solmes. A desperately attractive rake, Lovelace, pursues her with resentful infatuation and finally accomplishes her ruin towards the end of the fifth of seven volumes. The book's most serious fault from a modern reader's point of view is that the form—a series of letters from all the parties concerned to each other and their confidants—inevitably leads to the most important incidents of the story being told twice over. *Clarissa* is therefore not only wearisomely long but it moves slowly. The purity of the heroine is also sometimes thought irksome; in my opinion this is a very superficial objection. Like *Tristram Shandy* and the novels both of Dickens and of Dostoëvsky, *Clarissa* appeared serially, the first parts being published before the end was written. Thousands of readers followed each of the heroine's misfortunes, and when the fatal hour drew near, hundreds of broken-hearted women, drawn from all ranks of society, assailed the author with prayers and tears, begging that the most virtuous of women, the very paragon of her sex, might be spared the worst of all possible fates. They appealed in vain; the little printer experienced the grandest triumph possible to an author, enjoying the diabolic satisfaction of a great artist as he raped his heroine and threw all England into floods of tears.

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In *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* Richardson seeks through six volumes to exhibit a hero of as lofty and unimpeachable morality as the unfortunate Clarissa; the book's failing is its subject, for the author, attempting to draw a fine gentleman and a Christian, fails to make him either. Grandison, though quite a consistent and credible character, is smugly aware of his own virtue. However, like all heroes, he is at his best in an emergency. The following passage written by Harriet Byron on her honeymoon, when she has at last married Sir Charles, shows the lengths to which Richardson will go in order to exhibit her as a pattern of propriety; such passages have always been a source of profane joy for many of his readers:

We may, in great measure, thank the poetical tribe for the fascination. I hate them all. Are they not inflamers of the worst passions? With regard to the *Epics*, would Alexander, madman as he was, have been so much a madman, had it not been for Homer? Of what violences, murders, depredations, have not the Epic poets been the occasion, by propagating false honour, false glory and false religion? Those of the *amorous class* ought in all ages (could their future genius's for tinkling sound and measure have been known) to have been strangled in their cradles. Abusers of talents given them for better purposes (for, all this time, I put Sacred poesy out of the question); and avowedly claiming a right to be *licentious*, and to overleap the bounds of decency, truth, and nature.

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The worst fault of Fielding as a novelist is clearly stated by Sir Leslie Stephen when he wrote: "The existing standard of sound sense prescribes an impassible limit to his imagination". This, in my opinion, is fatal to anyone who aims at drawing a complete and convincing picture of humanity—and such was unquestionably Fielding's object. He did not seek simply to entertain but to tell the truth about mankind and to instruct it. Fielding had

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a weight chained to one leg—a load of common sense, sceptical disbelief in disinterested human motives. His characters never rise above the obvious; there is no such thing as idealism or poetry, or romantic frenzy, or the stark staring lunacy which play so important a part in human affairs. Fielding can be sentimental, but he can never be idealistic. Because he had observed that people usually acted with self-interest, he inclines to believe that their motives are always self-interested too.

For example, he tells us that jealousy is assumed by wives because they want the satisfaction of tormenting those they hate, namely their husbands. This shows a readiness to judge by superficial appearances and an ignorance of the self-torturing human heart of which Richardson would never have been guilty. The same lack of imagination is shown most unpleasantly in the brutality with which Fielding describes such scenes as the battle between Molly Segrim, a girl of sixteen, and the villagers who mob her for wearing one of Sophia Western's cast-off frocks which she has put on to conceal her pregnancy. One does not object to Molly flooring a tailor with a well-thrown skull picked up on the edge of a newly dug grave, nor to her laying about her with a thigh-bone, but it is a shock to find that the thought of an old village whore tearing out the hair of a pregnant strumpet of sixteen thoroughly appeals to Fielding's appetite. He is not here interested in the cruelty of human nature, nor does he think it needs interpretation. Women tearing each other's hair is funny to him just as clowns falling off a ladder are to us. He expects us to think it as good fun as to see a terrier being mauled by a badger. The capacity to enjoy either requires something much worse than coarseness, a complete absence of imagination. Once his sympathy is awakened, Fielding

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is another man. For example, when Tom Jones has first confessed his love to Sophia, both the lovers are overcome by emotion and Sophia asks him to help her back to the house.

Jones, who was hardly able to support himself, offered her his arm . . . and thus this young pair tottered and trembled along, the lover not once daring to squeeze the hand of his mistress, though it was locked in his.

That sentence seems suddenly to transport the reader into the world of Stendhal, though I fancy that he, with greater accuracy, would have written: "*Jones ne pensa même pas à lui caresser la main. . .*" Richardson was handicapped by the form of a novel told in a series of letters, a form which paralyses the telling of a story though it lends it a certain fictitious realism, which prevents us from questioning what we learn through this medium. Just the same qualities of paralysis and of convincingness are to be found in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*; Laclos is nearer to Richardson in form and in spirit than any English writer. Fielding, however, chose to imprison his narrative wantonly in another manner, from which, indeed, the English novel has not yet got free. If Richardson's repetitions and Sterne's digressions are faults, they have inflicted no lasting damage on the novelists who have come after them; the eighteen first chapters of the eighteen books which make up *Tom Jones* are still potent sources of mischief. Richardson and Sterne have had but the slightest influence on our literature: that of Fielding has been enormous.

There are not many pure artists in England, and even fewer persons have the ambition to become anything of the kind. But there are a great many magistrates and a great many parsons and enormous numbers of potential, would-be magistrates and parsons. Nowadays there are

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not enough criminals to be sentenced and admonished or congregations to be exhorted. There is not enough room on the bench or in the pulpit for them all. But the embryo beaks and the rose-eating caterpillars have found a profitable substitute for law-courts and churches in the English novel and in the weekly press. This vast army of bores, that has used the novel to lecture us about human nature, good and evil, duty and self-sacrifice, designing men and weeping women, has always found its fatal precedent in Fielding. He was indeed a great novelist but he focussed the attention of the reader upon the author; he made the author the central figure of the novel.

After this indictment, a catalogue of the faults of Smollett would come as an unpardonable anti-climax. I shall pass them over to bestow a few words of praise on Richardson. The characters in his novels all speak for themselves; they are intensely occupied in describing and debating every moment of those intimate concerns which make up their lives. Each has his or her own character and turn of mind and eagerly reveals himself to us. We are thus as closely in contact with them as possible; watching them with our own eyes and not being told about them in long-winded, second-hand descriptions. They have the freshness and the vitality of people we hear talking of their intimate affairs on the balcony below us; Richardson has pushed us up into a position from which we can see and hear everything; he hardly ever interposes himself between his characters and us. This freshness of contact between the reader and the characters is very rare in the English novel, which almost always presents a blurred impression of the world as though it were seen through a milky lens. Jane Austen's characters have the quality I am describing in a supreme degree. But it is hardly an exaggeration to say that *Clarissa* and *Emma*,

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Miss Howe and Elizabeth Bennet, Lovelace and Mr Darcy, have the same kind of existence in our minds. Richardson, like Jane Austen, knew just what he felt about his characters and just what they were like, and in spite of his long-windedness and his fine sentiments he brings it out and makes them reveal themselves. But while Jane Austen's characters develop in the course of one of her novels, Richardson's stand still—or rather they degenerate. As the endless correspondences drag on, the writers of the letters have to be taken more and more for granted and almost subside into the stock figures of a thousand serials or novelettes.

The quality of Richardson's which is perhaps most surprising in so long-winded a writer is his dramatic power, though without it *Clarissa* could hardly have been a great success when it appeared part by part. Richardson has the secret of keeping us in a state of intense excitement to know more. As an instance I will quote the following note:

Mr Lovelace to John Belford, Esq.,

Tuesday morn, June 13.

And now, Belford, I can go no further. The affair is over. *Clarissa* lives. And I am

Your humble servant,

R. LOVELACE.

In these words we learn that *Clarissa*, whom we believe to be drugged with opium, has been ravished. And in the next few pages we meet our proud heroine changed into an Ophelia, or the Jailor's daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, into one of Shakespeare's girls wandering in her wits and scribbling on bits of paper, and tearing up, such notes as:

PAPER III

A Lady took a great fancy to a young lion, or a bear, I forget which—But a bear, or a tyger, I believe, it was. It was made her a present

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of, when a whelp. She fed it with her own hand: she nursed up the wicked cub with great tenderness, and would play with it, without fear or apprehension of danger: and it was obedient to all her commands: and its tameness, as she used to boast, increased with its growth; so that like a lap-dog, it would follow her all over the house. But mind what followed: at last, somehow, neglecting to satisfy its hungry maw, or having otherwise disobliged it on some occasion, it resumed its nature; and on a sudden fell upon her, and tore her in pieces. And who was most to blame, I pray? The brute, or the Lady? The Lady, surely—For what she did was out of nature, out of character, at least: what it did, was in its own nature.

The effect of this upon us, after *Clarissa's* hundred letters, all compacted with virtuous and practical good sense, is terrific. It is not only an admission of her own feelings for *Lovelace*, which could not be expressed in another form, but it is a piece of observation of which *Fielding* would have been absolutely incapable. *Richardson*, like *Shakespeare*, could interpret *Ophelia* when he met her; *Fielding* would have laughed loudly at a crazy girl. We must admit, however, that *Richardson* never shows us a wide scene; we get a casual impression of England as a prosperous country inhabited by landed gentry, prosperous families of merchants, pious doctors, and certain wicked designing aristocrats who are abetted by hideous beldames, like horned toads. The world of *Fielding* is more credible; in it we meet with criminals, street-walkers, the poor, the vicious and the exploited, we look into prison and learn what it is like to be an outcast without money in one's pocket. *Amelia* tells us, in prose, everything which *Hogarth* recorded in paint, but neither the author nor the artist, it may be noticed, had any eye for a landscape. Through all *Tom Jones's* adventures we never feel the wind blowing freshly in our faces or know the joy of setting out on a spring morning through Somerset. *Fielding*, though inferior in dramatic power,

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was greatly Richardson's superior in the management of a plot; every accident leads on. Indeed Fielding's power in this respect is perhaps the greatest of his gifts.

I do not wish to pretend that Smollett is a great novelist or that he has been a valuable influence upon the writers like Scott who came after him and plundered his work. To attempt to arrange our writers into a hierarchy of merit, into those whom it is permissible to admire and those that are to be condemned, appears an exceedingly worthless occupation. It is better worth noting that Smollett provides many people at a certain time in their lives with an essential element.

In my own case—some six or seven years ago, I bought the complete works of Smollett and sat down and read *Peregrine Pickle*, *Roderick Random* and *Humphrey Clinker* straight through, during which time I could read nothing else. I then arose rejuvenated and refreshed, with my appetite for Smollett quenched.

The debt of Smollett to Le Sage and to Cervantes, both of whom he translated, or pretended to translate, is obvious, but what struck me was that he was making a blundering and unconscious approach to the kind of criticism of life that Voltaire expressed in *Candide*. He is said to delight in coarseness and brutality just as Swift has been said to delight in ordure. It is perhaps not unnatural that a ship's surgeon, who had taken part in the unsuccessful siege of Cartagena, should have been unable to forget them. He was a savage character, and it is partly this savagery, and humour, and partly his delight in action, which makes him so extraordinarily readable. Congreve, I think, gave us the first portrait of the British sailor in *Love for Love*, Smollett established him and fixed his characteristics for all those who came after. Besides furnishing the English novel with this stock type, Smollett

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set an example of gusto. I shall quote as an instance the treatment of the beggar girl who had been adopted by Peregrine Pickle, a passage which compares well in humour with Fielding's treatment of poor Molly Segrim:

He (the old seaman) delivered the letter and the lady to the lieutenant, who no sooner understood the intention of his friend, than he ordered all the tubs in the house to be carried into the hall, and filled with water. Tom having provided himself with swabs and brushes, divested the fair stranger of her variegated drapery, which was immediately committed to the flames, and performed upon her soft and sleek person, the ceremony of scrubbing, as it is practised upon the king's ships of war. Yet the nymph herself did not submit to this purification without repining. She cursed the director, who was upon the spot, with many abusive allusions to his wooden leg; and as for Pipes, the operator, she employed her talons so effectually upon his face, that the blood ran over his nose in sundry streams; and next morning, when those rivulets were dry, his countenance resembled the rough bark of a plumb tree, plastered with gum. Nevertheless he did his duty with great perseverance, cut off her hair, close to the scalp, handled his brushes with dexterity, applied his swabs of different magnitude and texture as required; and lastly, rinsed the whole body with a dozen pails of cold water discharged upon her head . . . when Peregrine arrived next day, he could scarcely believe his own eyes.

It is great fun, but the characters are clowns; we can feel their pathos without believing that they really feel like human beings when they are knocked over the head with a cudgel. We hear the sound of wood hitting wood. Smollett has at all events the negative merit of not pushing himself into the foreground like Fielding and holding up his novel in order to buttonhole the reader.

In my opinion Richardson's style is by far the most beautiful of the three novelists; Fielding's is humdrum in comparison, and "literary" as well, and Smollett's is plain and undistinguished. It is of course a thousand pities that Richardson was not brought up to the stage, or some other disreputable profession.

A. CALDER-MARSHALL

Laurence Sterne

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By A. Calder-Marshall

IT adds little to our appreciation of *The Beaux' Stratagem* to know that Farquhar composed it on his deathbed to provide money for his family. Nor is it illuminating that Johnson wrote *Rasselas* in a week to pay his mother's debts and give her decent burial. Biographical detail is only necessary to explain flaws or unevenness in a work of art. It shows weakness in *Tristram Shandy* that it needs such explanation.

In 1741 Laurence Sterne became Prebendary of York and married Elizabeth Lumley. He did not produce the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* till December of the year 1759. He had spent the meantime administering two parishes near York; had been driven by lack of money to deputize sermons in the Minster, even for his enemies; and he had written a few pamphlets and a vast number of addresses from which he later selected the best for *Sermons by Yorick*.

Even when he was a young man, his nature was divided between responsibility and irresponsibility; between the serious profession he had adopted and the spontaneous gaiety of his nature. The Church, his wife and his daughter Lydia symbolized solidity for him. His Cambridge friend, John Hall Stevenson, and the "Demoniacs" who gathered at Crazy Castle, stood for the opposing principle. Attractive young ladies of his acquaintance like Miss Fourmantelle were grouped alongside Stevenson,

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though Sterne's feelings towards them were sentimental, and in a legal sense entirely innocent.

According to Sterne, fame and not lack of money set him writing. But the meaning of fame needs definition. He did not take up writing as Gauguin took up painting, under internal compulsion. He was not prepared to forgo the adverse judgement of contemporaries in order to win regard from posterity. Desire for fame meant simply that he wished to be received and applauded by London society. He had often visited Stevenson, when he was at Crazy Castle. But when he went to London, Stevenson left him behind and came back with stories of the rumoured great which made Sterne envious and at the same time conscious that given his chance he himself could shine in such a company. He had reached an age when he wanted to play his life out on a larger stage. His work was not an end in itself, but the means of gaining the reputation necessary to his entering society. That object achieved, money became essential for him to maintain his new social position.

Candide appeared some six months prior to *Tristram*. It was written by a man with the means to support the life which Sterne was eager to undertake. Yet its conclusion was that the best life was the sort which Sterne was so eager to leave. Leaving his garden, Sterne met at the gate Voltaire, prepared to cultivate it.

For Sterne's object to be achieved, *Tristram Shandy* had to please London society. His purpose, he constantly claimed, was to entertain. To entertain, it may be added, that particular section of society into which he wished to gain admission. He succeeded. *Tristram Shandy*, Volumes I and II, were the rage of the season. And when he came to London, Sterne proved himself to be as witty, volatile and charming in life as he was in print.

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Sterne's visit to London was a sort of postponed adolescence. The son of a poor ensign who had married the daughter of a sutler to whom he was indebted, he was intoxicated by the ease of his reception by titled nitwits, not seeing that an equal ease of rejection was implied thereby. He played in life the part of Yorick, the jester of his social superiors, the funnier for being in clericals. For as always, what might seem frankness in a layman appeared brilliant in a clergyman; while the ordinary licence of the secular was piquantly daring from a divine.

Sterne's career was not easy. He had gone the limit in *Tristram Shandy*. Bishops might laugh in their studies but they would have to frown in public. He had need of all his tact, a quality in which he was not over rich. The press took him up, the first author to be "news". His remarks were reported and other people's imputed to him, provided they were witty or risky enough. Witticisms that passed at a dinner looked obscene in news-print.

For example, a malicious rumour was circulated that he intended to draw a caricature of Dr. Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, as the tutor of Tristram. The gossip writers reported it, and Sterne found his reputation taken out of his hands. He did not wish to offend Warburton, because he admired him as much as he feared him. Sterne assured Garrick that there was no truth in the rumour, and at a meeting arranged by the actor Gloucester congratulated Sterne on *Tristram* and presented him with a purse of gold. All was peace again.

All was peace, until the gossips revived the rumour in new form. Dr. Warburton, fearing Yorick's projected satire, had bought him off with a purse of gold. Sterne was a literary blackmailer. And when Sterne left this rumour to die its own death, the further scandal was

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circulated that the author of *Tristram Shandy* himself was responsible for the rumour because he needed the publicity. Harassed on this side by the smut hounds, Sterne was gently reprovved by Dr. Warburton on the other. The Bishop seems to have had genuine admiration for Sterne. But he was afraid that, in becoming his sponsor, he had been injudicious. Fear for Sterne's reputation was reinforced by apprehension for his own. Sterne answered his gentle reproof in a letter, half acquiescent, half defiant. "It was hard to mutilate everything in it, down to the prudish humour of every particular." "I will however do my best, though, laugh, my Lord, I will, and as loud as I can too."

Warburton finally pronounced Sterne an "irrevocable scoundrel". But considering the scandal in which Sterne involved both himself and the Church, and considering the letters of protest which his bishop received from puritan members of the Church, Sterne's treatment was remarkably lenient. This was possibly due to the fact that while he carefully avoided satire on the Church of England except in one passage (Book VIII, Chapter xxvi), he was free with his mockery of the Church of Rome.

A little more and biography can be left aside. In 1759 Sterne was already suffering from consumption. He was liable at any moment to break a blood vessel in his throat and set himself spitting. His life in London, hectically pursued in the fore-knowledge of an early death, aggravated that condition and brought death nearer still.

When he returned to Yorkshire, he left his heart in London. *Shandy* was the means of procuring the money for another London season. He settled to work again, but with this difference. He now wished to justify himself to the Monthly Reviewers, who had drubbed him down. He wanted to work out for himself the relation

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between irresponsibility and responsibility, Hall and Warburton or as he termed it, Wit and Judgement. And at all costs he wanted money.

He dashed off the two requisite volumes, shortening up his narrative on Book IV, seeing that the two volumes annually for forty years which he had envisaged were not likely to be written. Then he returned to London where he could exercise his true art, that of conversation, without the fatigue of writing it down.

The same process took place with the third batch; but during his third London visit his health so declined that, on the advice of Hall and permission of his bishop, he set out for the south of France to recuperate. He was waylaid in Paris, however, and stayed there longer than was wise, until ill-health drove him south.

The new experience of travelling excited him. The impressions that he received were delightful, and he wanted to let the people in London know that his reception in Paris had been generous. He had *Shandyed* it in French, with greater success even than in England. It did not matter that much of the laughter must have been at the howlers, which he made with the fluency of unconscious ignorance.

He found it impossible to return to *Shandy*. Book VII is entirely taken up by an account of his travels, under the scarcely sustained excuse that Tristram has just returned from the Continent and cannot get them out of his head. It was at this time that the idea of *A Sentimental Journey* first occurred to him and he was impatient to begin it. Though the eighth volume of *Shandy* returned ostensibly to Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman, it was compacted of shameless padding and shows Sterne to have been as bored with his theme as he was apprehensive of death. The death theme recurs through-

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out the whole book, but at the end it grows more and more frequent.

Three years elapsed between the publication of Vols. V, VI and Vols. VII, VIII. It was another two years before Vol. IX appeared. While the last Book kept more to the point than the two preceding, it was only one volume instead of the usual two, and half the normal size.

In 1768, seven days before his death, *A Sentimental Journey* was published, describing the seven months' tour he had taken in 1765.

Sterne's temperament was volatile. He seems to have found it hard to concentrate his thoughts. His mind flitted from subject to subject, idea to idea. As a conversationalist he must have been brilliant, because of this instability.

The artistic problem with which he was faced—and it was one which needed discipline to solve—was how he should discover a literary form suitable to his volatile temperament.

He was partly conscious of this, as the following extract shows:

. . . the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, and at the same time.

Here Sterne does two things. He tries to justify the conversational method of writing which came naturally to him: and he claims for his digressive style qualities which it possesses only at its greatest moments. The majority of his digressions are not deliberate in the way that he maintains. They are explained by his simpler remark: "It is not I, but my pen which writes". Or again, he

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refers to "that careless alacrity which, every day of my life, prompts me to say and write a thousand things I should not". His pen galloped away with him, and usually the utmost he could do was to bring it under control again, when it was exhausted, and pretend that he had known all the time where it was going. At other times, and especially towards the end of *Shandy* when his desire to write was flagging with his health, he forced himself to "Shandy"-ize. In such places all interest fails. What before was a brilliant interlude in the narrative becomes a ponderous stepping-stone towards the end of the volume.

Mr Percy Fitzgerald, who did Sterne the disservice of writing his biography, substituting the moral sensibility of a church elder for Thackeray's abusive vulgarity, concludes that "the piquant grossness" of *Shandy* "fetched the town", but that "the second and fixed period of fame" depended on the humour of the four or five leading characters. Many readers will agree with Mr Fitzgerald, though they cannot share the moral shiver which the biographer gets from the coarse passages.

To do so, however, is entirely to neglect what Sterne was trying, if failing, to do. He is classed as a novelist, and is judged by the same standards as Fielding, Smollett or even Henry James. Half *Tristram Shandy* is neglected because only half of it is in novel form. The rest bears more affinities to Montaigne, Selden or Burton, than to anything in fiction.

There were two possibilities open to Sterne. He could have adopted existent literary forms and written two books, one a novel concerned with the Shandy Family and the other a volume of essays or table talk. Or he could, with greater difficulty, have discovered a new

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literary form, at once digressive and progressive, which would have resolved these two elements in his work, the personal and the descriptive. Sterne chose the second alternative, not because it was the more difficult, but because he was lazy. He did not face the problem, but wrote as the mood took him. As a result, *Tristram Shandy* is technically a hotch-potch, without even the unity of mood in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

The reason is that Sterne was not a professional writer: and though an artist, he was not an artist in writing, but in speech. He had the love of his voice, the multiplication of phrase on phrase, the syntax and punctuation of a natural conversationalist, or rather than conversationalist, of a gifted "barker" standing outside a booth to collect a crowd to see the fat lady, or a peddler of patent medicines in the market-place talking on politics, love and money to induce the mob to buy his coloured water. *Tristram Shandy* was his sample and letter of introduction to London society. "If you like this sort of thing, you'll like me."

The conflict in Sterne was one of responsibility and irresponsibility, or as it presented itself to him, between Wit and Judgement. He defends himself in Book III, Chapter xx, as follows:

Now *Agelastes* (speaking dispraisingly) sayeth. That there may be some wit in it, for aught he knows—but no judgment at all. And *Triptolemus* and *Phutatorius*, agreeing thereto, ask, How is it possible there should? for that wit and judgment in this world never go together; inasmuch as they are two operations differing from each other as wide as east from west—So, says Locke—so are farting and hickuping say I . . .

Here stands *wit*—and there stands *judgment*, close beside it, just like the two knobs upon the back of this selfsame chair on which I am sitting . . . duplicated embellishments—to answer one another.

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In what he says, Sterne is quite right. There need be no conflict between wit and judgement. But just as his fellow-clergy erred on the side of Judgement and Hall Stevenson on the side of Wit, so Sterne swung between the two, being over grave with the grave and too gay with the gay. His wit led him to remarks of which his judgement disapproved, and the notoriety which his position gave him brought his inconsistencies into open conflict. To be inconsistent is the nature of man but the shame of celebrities.

Though it gave Sterne great pleasure to hear himself described as the "English Rabelais", the comparison was superficial. They were both clerics. Both wrote books which made their readers laugh. Both used vulgar words. But in temperament, outlook and style they are in fact as different as any other two men. Sterne certainly copied Rabelais in his lists and the invention of assonances like "all the *Frusts* and *Crusts* and *Rusts* of antiquity". But this is Sterne at his worst. He had no talent for verbal invention.

More than Rabelais, Sterne admired Cervantes and his influence was greater. The figures of Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim are half-conscious attempts to reproduce Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in an English setting.

These two figures of Sterne's have only to be compared with Cervantes to show their peculiar merits and shortcomings. Toby and Trim are on the ground. They live and breathe like human beings, are in fact humans drawn in the large, and only slightly distorted by Sterne's acceptance of the theory of "humours".¹

¹ The characters of Mrs Shandy and the Widow Wadman and Dr. Slop are "humorous" characters in this limited sense. The only characteristic distinguishing Mrs Shandy is acquiescence with her

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Sterne took a similar theme to Cervantes, the military-chivalrous spirit working *in vacuo*. He chose to portray a situation in which the servant was emotionally subordinate to his master's ideals, yet in the world's ways more practical and knowledgeable.

So far the comparison holds between *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy* but no further. The craziness of Don Quixote is inspired. The code of his behaviour is not illogical, but out-dated. He is an idealist in a material world, an aristocrat among merchants. Sancho is a half-way figure, sprung from a material world but striving towards the ideal. His relation towards Quixote, half reverent, half rebellious, forms the necessary bridge and buffer between the two extremes.

The relation of Toby and Trim is less subtle. Each has a single rôle and particular humour from which he varies little. A common queerness unites their activities. Whereas Quixote and Panza become symbols in their pursuit of an ideal, Toby and Trim remain what they are, two lovable and ridiculous figures, whose sincere and easy feelings compensate for their oddity.

Again an analysis of our laughter at Cervantes and Sterne reveals the difference. We laugh at Toby and Trim because they are ridiculous, harmless and absurd. We see their follies and forgive, or rather than forgive we

husband, no matter whether she understands him or not. The Widow Wadman wishes merely to have a husband who is capable of being a husband. Dr. Slop started with the caricature of Dr. John Burton and a parody of his ideas on midwifery. He ended by becoming a Catholic whipping-post, his reactions being those of a fanatical sectarian.

Yorick is, of course, a self portrait. The digression on his character in the First Book is evidence of the same desire for autobiography that expresses itself in the constant intrusion both of *Tristram* and the author.

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enjoy their humours. With Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, it is their situation, the conflict between their logic and the logic of the world, which provokes laughter and gives the sense of tragedy at the same time. Sterne pleads for our sympathy. We give it to Quixote without the need for advocacy.

The reason for this is that the other side of Sterne is sentimentality, or rather sensibility. Sterne would have been a better artist perhaps if he had been the debauchee he is supposed to have been. As it was, his preference for sentimental situations, for the kissed hand, the fleeting glance, the lovely memory, led to a softness in his tender moods that is sheer contradiction to his humour.

Regard the following:

Maria look'd wistfully for some time at me and then at her goat—and then at me—and then at her goat again, and so on, alternately—
—Well Maria, said I softly—what resemblance do you find?

I do entreat the candid reader to believe me, that it was from the humblest conviction of what a *Beast* man is—that I asked the question, and that I would not have let fallen an unseasonable pleasantry in the venerable presence of Misery, to be entitled to all the wit that ever Rabelais scatter'd—and yet I own my heart smote me, and that I so smarted at the very idea of it, that I swore I would set up for Wisdom, and utter grave sentences the rest of my days—and never never attempt again to commit mirth with man, woman, or child, the longest day I had to live.

In Sterne a division exists between what is serious and what comic. As moods, they are contradictory. In Cervantes, they are fused. What is most comic is also most tragic.¹ The relation of Quixote to Dulcinea, for

¹ The same is true of Falstaff, but not of Pistol, Bardolph, etc., to whom Sterne's comic figures are similar: with this exception, Shakespeare presents, where Sterne has to apologize. This trait of Sterne's is clerical. "I may appear malicious, but I really love my neighbour as myself."

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example, could not have been treated impersonally by Sterne, and as a result the tragic-comic contrast of actuality and fantasy could never have been achieved.

Sterne's sentimentality is especially apparent in his treatment of Maria both in *Shandy* and in *A Sentimental Journey*. It is the least important side of the novelist and the least individual. Here is a passage from *A Sentimental Journey*:

Maria, Moulines. Her goat had been as faithless as her lover, and she had got a little dog in lieu of him, which she had kept tied by a string to her girdle: as I look'd at her dog, she drew him towards her with the string. "Thou shalt not leave me Sylvio", she said. I look'd in Maria's eyes, and saw she was thinking more of her father than of her lover or her little goat; for as she utter'd them, the tears trickled down her cheeks.

I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell, with my handkerchief. I then steep'd it in my own—and then in her's—and then in mine—and then I wip'd her's again, and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.

I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pestered the world ever convince me to the contrary.

The erotic situation of weeping by the side of the road turn about with a beautiful half-wit, the concentration on one's own feelings, the deduction of the existence of the soul from the capacity of weeping, are common symptoms of the "sensibility" of Sterne's day.

He pulled out a cloth
And wiped a tear off
And said, what a fine soul have I.

In conclusion. As a writer, Sterne had more obvious shortcomings than any other writer of his stature. As a novelist in the accepted sense of the word, he would have been a failure, if it had been his purpose to write novels.

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As a comedian, he falls short of the highest standards. He lacks the detachment to make even his comic characters great in the way that Quixote, Falstaff or Gargantua and Pantagrue are great.

What he has done in his long rambling, shambling *Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* is to write an autobiography that is the more vivid for its not being an intentional self-portrait. It is an impressionist study on the style of his impression of a fiddle being tuned (Book V, Chapter xv). "Ptr...r...ing...twing...twang prut—trut—'tis a cursed bad fiddle", etc.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent., is the product of a man living onto paper, and thinking onto paper, showing himself here by a story, here a sermon, here a chapter on Knots or Chamberpots. From these snapshots of the man, his whole character is built up.

That is the only reason that I can find which will explain why *Tristram*, which falls short in all the ways I have outlined, remains a book that as a whole is still alive and full of interest.

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Jane Austen

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By Elizabeth Bowen

JANE AUSTEN, who died a hundred and eighteen years ago, brought the English novel to a point nearer perfection than it has reached since. As a form, the novel has several parts or aspects—social photography, charted emotion, dialogue, delineation of people. Each of these has been made, from time to time, by (in her sense) “respectable” novelists his or her main province. It is possible to give a fair, if flattish, picture of life by approaching one’s subject ably on any one of these sides. But Jane Austen’s ability was comprehensive: she did more than approach a subject, she surrounded it. Thus her novels are novels in the most classic sense.

Their Englishness is, moreover, their peculiar triumph. The English novel has, on the whole, suffered from having been written after writers’ glory in being English had begun to decline. The most minor Elizabethan play has a quality—a kind of absoluteness or thoroughgoingness—that the most distinguished novel too often lacks. (*Wuthering Heights* is the best exception to this.) There is a great drop in pressure: greater, I think, than the change of medium—prose for verse—accounts for. In this field, the nineteenth-century Russians succeeded to what properly should have been the English heritage: heroicism, a kind of overbearing spirituality. Tolstoy is in the succession of Shakespeare, Dostoëvsky of Webster. Eng-

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lish novelists, whether consciously or unconsciously, wear their nationality as a shackle rather than as a decoration of honour. Moral strife is, largely, their subject: it is the greatest of subjects, but in approaching it they suffer from moral cramp. With the close of the eighteenth century, French classical influence with its restraints gone, fancy, let loose again, showed a good deal of weakness. Enforced form had bolstered this weakness up. But now columns gave place to arches and tracery: one no longer built to enclose light but to cast gothic shadows. Life is always impinged upon by a literary fashion, and Jane Austen saw round her a world in which, genteel and orderly as it was, the new sensibility began to luxuriate. On what promised to be a kind of garden jungle, a sinister dusk of ferns, she imposed her two twin orders, Elegance and Propriety. Qualities one would be prepared, in the last resort, to die for, that one would be prepared, at least, to sacrifice a life to, take on an ideality of their own. Her sense of values was more than positive; it would have been passionate once put to the proof. The unchangingness of her characters' moral colour, the unswervingness of their pursuit of an aim, would make them major, apart from anything else. Her people are so relentlessly thoroughgoing—Anne Eliot in her regret, Miss Bates in her power to bore, Fanny in her humility, Mr Darcy in his pride, Elinor in her stability, Harriet in her goosishness, Mrs Bennett in her desire to get her girls off, Emma in her determination to rule—that she creates, in the heart of the mannered Regency, a muted Elizabethan world of her own. On the polite plane, violence has its equivalent. Witty, detached, engaging and travelling lightly, her pen has been dipped in the purest English ink. *Persuasion* and *Emma* are as outstandingly English as *War and Peace* is Russian or *L'Éducation sentimentale* French.

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Her keen eye is for the manner, but sees the spirit behind.

She lived, it is true, in a small and very secure world, in which values were not questioned: nothing got dragged up. Her unperplexity—or the resentment it arouses—is perhaps at the root of many objections to her. The charge of tameness against her is in itself so wild, the charge of triviality so trivial, that there must be something rather deeper behind them. She has been more fairly, perhaps, disliked than patronized—her own ironic remark about the two inches of ivory always pursuing her. No woman had ever less the provinciality of her sex, no lady less the provinciality of her sphere. It is all very well to talk grandiosely about the world in general: one's nearest hope of knowing the world in general is to synthesize one's knowledge of the particular. Accident—the accident of her birth—dictated the scene and scope of her novels but did not restrict their power. She was a very rare example—perhaps Proust was another—of intelligence articulating with the social personality; she was one of those happy natures whose very stuff is intelligence, with which nothing goes to waste, that everything alimments. Provinciality is a malady bred of being too much engaged with one's surroundings: the provinciality of Bohemia is well known. To be unprovincial is to know what is important, to see the exact importance of everything that you see. To underrate a deliberately quiet life is, absurdly, to confuse experience with knowledge. Every writer is born with something to find out, and Jane Austen, by dancing circumspectly at county balls, chatting with people in drawing-rooms, staying with her relations and visiting Bath and London, found out what it was necessary for her to know.

She enjoyed being a woman, and being a gentlewoman.

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Emulativeness and the succeeding antagonisms did not distort her view of the other sex. Her men characters appear in company only, and are present only in relation to women—as hosts (Sir John Middleton, Mr Weston), fathers (Mr Bennett, Mr Woodhouse), uncles (Sir Thomas Bertram), suitors (Mr Elton, Mr Collins), flirts (Frank Churchill, Mr Wickham), *partis* (Mr Bingley), husbands (Mr John Knightley, Mr John Dashwood), incalculable admirers (Mr Darcy, Henry Crawford, Henry Tilney), or, though rarely, the magnetic beloved object upon whom happiness depends (Captain Wentworth and, passingly, Willoughby). Their appearance in any of these rôles she describes with an unastounded, friendly exactitude. She had a keen cool amused ear for how gentlemen talked. Sport, business and manners in love were not her province, but she did know a little about the Navy and usefully brought that in. The Army remains an occupation for officers when not busy dancing or paying calls. With her respect for the Church, Henry Tilney's charming whimsical elegance was not out of colour. It is not because Edmund Bertram is an earnest young clergyman that he does not, as a hero, entirely come off. Their cloth does not protect Mr Elton and Mr Collins. . . . In men, she honoured integrity (even stiffened at times by a touch of priggishness, as in Edmund Bertram and Mr Knightley), expected and was amused by amiability and good address, and was agreeably susceptible to charm—no woman who was not could have brought Frank Churchill, Willoughby, Henry Crawford and Henry Tilney to life. She must have been one of those fortunate young women who can enjoy glamour without having illusions. She writes about men with a distant confidence that I believe to be justified. It is women who write about men with an awful matey knowingness who give one a saddening sense

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of the handicaps of their sex. . . . Adultery occurred but was also outside her province: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery". She was, however, not squeamish: the disgraceful affair of Willoughby and Miss Williams, though touched in fairly lightly, is not scamped. The thought of sexual misery both depressed and offended her: moreover it was socially inconvenient. It is true that her characters are preoccupied with marriage, and that the novels hinge on who is to marry whom. But the subject, with its ramifications, is absorbing still. And when one heard more about marriage one heard less about sex.

Her two most imposing men are Mr Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. . . . Mr Darcy falls for Elizabeth Bennett, with her disconcerting charm and impossible family, against his will: he shows the extraordinary bends and twists a reluctant love takes. In a crisis—and his relations with Elizabeth, up to the end of the book, are a series of muffled crises—Mr Darcy retreats on a violent formality. Compound of passion and snobbery, he is a Proustian figure. Humiliated by his own inconvenient love, he tries to put his friend Bingley off marrying Elizabeth's sister Jane: the Bennett family simply do not do. Encounters between Mrs Bennett and Mr Darcy, in Elizabeth's hearing, are studies in acute mortification. He was a man of the strongest family feeling; had he not been, his own aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, would have distressed him more. Evidently he had the maximum power of embarrassing people: why else should the dauntless Elizabeth have minded so much when he came on her walking with her uncle and aunt in his park? The situation was, it is true, a little embarrassing, but something about Mr Darcy made it a good deal worse. He is a good man, a man of integrity, with the sombre attractiveness of a wicked one. Returning again

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and again to Mr Darcy, one pays Jane Austen the compliment of deciding that there was more to him than she knew. He has that cloudy outline important characters should have; does not seem to have been "created" in the limited brain-bound sense so much as observed fleetingly out of the corner of an eye, recollected uncertainly, speculated upon. One takes him to be a devious, constantly self-regarding and very passionate man—but he soars out of the picture—most of him happens off. In a woman writer's book, any man who is intended to be either important or magnetic ought to have this quality. . . . Henry Crawford is more energetic, dashing and unscrupulous. He has a certain *beauté du diable*. Though not, like Frank Churchill, a high-spirited, rather engagingly silly flirt, he is sardonically irresponsible where the Miss Bertrams are concerned. He is the most sophisticated of Jane Austen's men, and has also an excellent intellect: when he is at Mansfield Park they have good after-dinner talk (*vide* the conversation about Shakespeare). He had "moral taste"—a particular aesthetic sensibility to innocence—which is in keeping with his character. ("Moral taste" is interesting: only highly civilized and really rather morally neutral people have it: it is the stuff of James and Turgenev novels.)

Henry Crawford watches the young shy Fanny—who already so much attracts him—and her sailor brother William together. He

saw, with lively admiration, the glow of Fanny's cheek, the brightness of her eye, the deep interest, the absorbed attention, while her brother was describing any of the imminent hazards or terrific scenes, which such a period at sea must supply.

It was a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value. Fanny's attractions increased—increased twofold. . . .

He enjoyed, in fact, and enjoyed morally also, this innocent

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kindling of her windflower beauty. But there is a kind of niceness about Henry Crawford; no hint of the jaded palate about his feeling for Fanny. His susceptibility is complex. Fanny's refusal to marry him twists him back on himself in a mood of destructive ugliness and ill-temper. His affair, then elopement, with Maria Rushworth (*née* Bertram) is the result. One can only suppose he turned to Maria Bertram as being the type of woman he really most disliked—neither gallant nor innocent. It was one more of his "freaks of cold-blooded vanity". Had he not, already, virtually, "lost the woman he rationally as well as passionately loved"? It is impossible not to be impatient with Fanny for her refusal (if one has not, indeed, become impatient with her already). Henry Crawford was her one chance of growing up. As it is, she remains with the colourless Edmund: loyal, jejune and prim. We are told Henry Crawford regretted the injury he did to Mansfield Park in ruining Maria. But this regret in itself may have been a bitter pleasure. There are times when one feels Henry Crawford an exile from a French novel. But he remains an Englishman. Jane Austen knew an amazing amount about him, and—involuntarily—liked him a good deal. Like Mr Darcy, but more so, he towers outside the book in which he appears. Mr Darcy is part of the structure of *Pride and Prejudice*, but Henry Crawford counters the moral rhythm of *Mansfield Park*—which is at once the most intellectual and the most nearly insincere novel she wrote.

Her women—even her quieter women—have an astounding vitality. Only Fanny Price is unvital, and Fanny does not, to my mind at least, come off. Elizabeth Bennett and Emma have a Shakespearean gallant calm uncoyness. These two heroines diffuse themselves through the pages with such extraordinary brilliance that

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it is difficult to believe they are not in the room. Anne Eliot's is a vitality of the heart: she has Fanny's delicacy and recessiveness, but is not at any moment insipid or dim; you would always know she was there. She is essentially grown-up. At a time when to be unmarried at twenty-seven tended to be either pitiable or ridiculous, she remains assured and graceful, playing the piano for the young people to dance. . . . Marianne Dashwood, though her view of life is intended to be preposterous, is lovely and moving, with her great dark eyes. Elinor Dashwood is stodgy but has a nice humour and behaves really extraordinarily well.

Emma and Elizabeth only discover their own states of heart towards the close of the novels they animate. Elinor loves Edward and Fanny Edmund from the outset; Anne's regret for Captain Wentworth, then reawakened love for him, is the spring of her being. Emotion in Elinor, Fanny and Anne is pertinacious, patient and curiously clear-headed. Marianne, on the contrary, is not only swept off her feet by her love for Willoughby, but positively leaps into the wave. Elizabeth's and Emma's awakenings to love are excellently in character. Nothing dims Elizabeth's gallant wit: she goes on gently pulling Mr Darcy's leg. With Emma "the dread of being awakened from the happiest dream was perhaps the most prominent feeling". All the same "while he spoke, her mind was busy".

Anne Eliot's feeling for Captain Wentworth is the only love in the novels which is poetic. Elinor Dashwood and Fanny both make one feel they feel the young men in question do not really know what is good for them. In not one of the novels does the simple upright worldliness of the setting (it would never do to marry any young man who would never do) invalidate any emotion felt. Anti-

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social love is not necessarily stronger or purer in quality than social love.

Jane Austen's attitude to each of her women is different. Emma is seen, and felt, as divinely unconsciously funny throughout. To see one's heroine through in a comic light, without buffooning her or devaluating her for the other characters, is an achievement. (Incidentally, Emma's feeling for Frank Churchill is an excellent study of vanity in the heart.) Fanny is not Jane Austen's type at all—she is projected, too palpably "created", a *tour de force* which does not come off. Jane Austen's love of goodness impregnates all the books, but it did not do to centre this round one character: she has rather a forced tenderness for Fanny. Elinor she liked but was not interested in; Elinor is a straight line of sanity ruled through the book, serves her purpose staunchly but remains rather abstract. Marianne she deplored, but Marianne remains moving; unforgettable is her scream of agony after getting Willoughby's fatal letter (and what a model of an unforgivable letter: "the lock of hair which you so obligingly bestowed on me"). . . . Elizabeth Bennett was clearly a joy to write about, to share vicissitudes with: Elizabeth and Jane Austen were kindred spirits; when Elizabeth came into being they were the same age, both going to balls. . . . Harriet was a sweet goose she had to like, Jane Fairfax intimidated her as much as she intimidated Emma, Mary Crawford's charm gained her in spite of herself, Lucy Steele's vulgarity and bogus emotion afflicted her as it did Elinor. . . . Anne Eliot remains the beloved grown-up friend, whose sorrows are shared, whose patience is honoured, whose beauty is seen. Jane Austen envelops her, unconsciously, in the greatness she had herself as a woman, the poeticness, the submissiveness, the courage that the younger novels had not yet brought into play.

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In *Persuasion*, Nature is present, and tenderly felt: up to now it has been simply a social factor—weather.

And what weather—opportune sometimes, difficult others, a saver of situations, a precipitator of crises. Snow in Highbury, rain in Bath, the June heat of the strawberry party at Donwell, through which Jane Fairfax sets out, distracted, for home, which made Frank Churchill so cross. The gay blowy day at Lyme Regis. What a glow from the fine day fixed for an outing—"Wednesday was fine, and soon after breakfast the barouche arrived. . . . Their road was through pleasant country." And, apart from the weather, what parties! Few writers' novels can hold so many, none so directly convey that (if the expression may be forgiven) a good time was had by all. She also transmits, with an extraordinary vivacity, the pleasure that people—in or out of love—take in each other's society: the charm of a new acquaintance, the surprise of a morning call, or the delight of looking at someone pretty. Here is Mary Crawford playing the harp in the rectory drawing-room:

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself, and both placed near a window cut down to the ground and opening on a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man's heart.

Elizabeth Bennett, with her colour, her grace, her vitality, is the most palpably attractive of the heroines (did she not magnetize Darcy's unwilling eyes?), Mary Crawford the most glamorous of the women. Emma must have had a lovely complexion, Elinor Dashwood had a pretty figure. None of her heroines are paragons, but they are all successes. She has a woman's regard for women who are a success, as well as the author's semi-parental pride. She knows, too, how to make the onlooker's eye add quality to its object: Emma is seen as

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Highbury's most important young lady, Elizabeth as she so disturbed Mr Darcy, Fanny kindling to brilliance with brother William, with Henry Crawford sitting watchfully by.

No possible shade of being bored, offended, mortified, nonplussed or flattered is overlooked by her, or not faithfully rendered. She was right: her people were young, vitally young, and when one is young these things are very important. A malaise, a regret, a reverse, what one thinks of somebody, what somebody seems to think of one, either muffle or decorate an entire day. The interaction of social and personal feeling was her subject, like Proust's, and her diagnosis was as correct.

The technique of the novels is beyond praise, and has been praised. Her mastery of the art she chose, or that chose her, is complete: how she achieved it no one will ever know. Though I suppose that none of her books are flawless, I cannot think of one clumsy blunder she made. Her intellect was so immediately applied, so closely related to what it fed on, so unabstract that it seems fitter to speak of it as intelligence: it was intelligence of a sublime kind. If she did speculate, this must have been in a series of photographs. She was as sensible about ideas as she was about men; she must have had a most uncloudy mind. Any wisps of reverie floating about in it got solidified into little touches in books. She was, in fact, the rightly adjusted person. . . . The kind of novel generally *called* intellectual is thin in texture, so that the anxious operation of the intellect shows. Because as a story it does not quite come off, you feel more bound to honour the author's high intention. But Jane Austen's are the truly intellectual novels because her mind impregnates the whole of their matter, functioning in every comma, adding colour, force, light.

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Any great book strikes one as having imposed itself on its author. The element of invention, of ingenuity, is palpable only in secondary books. But no book imposes itself on a passive mind. Something other, outside, may command and mobilize the imagination, but the brain has to leap up to cope with this, like a swarm of post-office hands with an incoming mail. The greater the force and speed of what is happening imaginatively, the colder and closer scrutiny this must have from the brain. An artist, to be effective, has to be half critic. Fancy and reason ought to have equal strength: in Jane Austen they had, which is why she wrote what were almost perfect novels. Her wit worked well, allowing her fancy pleasure; her fancy, by not halting, brought her wit to no heavy and cold pause. Her style is balanced, like someone skating beautifully. Her exhilaration must have been tremendous: perhaps she only half knew what was going on. An artist can never be fully conscious. But neither can he cut ice if he is not an unremittingly conscious executant.

She wrote novels, and wished to write nothing else. "Yes, novels," she says in *Northanger Abbey*, "... performances which have only genius, wit and taste to recommend them." When she died she was not old, and might still have written more. She had been ill for some time before that, and *Sanditon*, which had been put away, was unfinished, which is too bad.

EDWIN MUIR

Walter Scott

WALTER SCOTT

By Edwin Muir

THERE is probably no great novelist whose direct influence on the novel has been more trivial than that of Scott. His prestige in his own time and for half a century later was enormous: Goethe praised him, and Balzac and Hugo were inspired by him. But his lineal successors were Dumas, Bulwer Lytton, Harrison Ainsworth, G. P. R. James and Jane Porter, followed after a long interval by R. L. Stevenson. This line can be seen now as eccentric to the main progress of literature, a sort of fancy-dress masquerade. Scott was chiefly responsible for it, yet in creative power he was the greatest novelist in English literature.

A great novelist need not obviously influence the development of the novel, but we have a right to expect that he will uphold the tradition of the past. The worst charge we can make against Scott was that he did not do so. Before him the English novel could be taken seriously: Fielding's and Sterne's criticism of life was intelligent and responsible. Scott substituted for this criticism a mere repetition of the moral clichés of his time. In his stories the public got the upper hand of the novelist, and it has kept its advantage, with a few setbacks, ever since. Its most perfect instrument was Dickens, of whom one could not say whether he led his public or was led by it. The independent function of the writer broke down in him; he could do anything he liked with his readers

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because they could do anything they liked with him. If one looks back from this feverishly gregarious, almost hypnotic, relation between reader and writer to the rational one of the eighteenth century, one can see what an immense change occurred in the interval. Scott stood at the beginning of that change. And he did not have the excuse of being an untaught genius, like Dickens: he was a man of wide reading, an aristocrat by conviction, and a conservative. The only thing that he did not consider worth conserving was the standards of his own art.

The case against Scott must seem far worse to those who admire his genius than to critics like Mr E. M. Forster who see nothing in him but a facile and incompetent romancer. And it does not rest on the clumsy bookishness of his style, which may often be put down to the hurry of a powerful Scottish imagination struggling with a lexicon of eighteenth-century English phrases and feverishly picking out the wrong ones. It rests simply on the fact that we cannot take him seriously, as we take Fielding, Sterne and even Thackeray. We read these writers as thinking beings, for we are dealing with a picture of life which demands reasonable consideration. In reading Scott, on the other hand, we give up thinking altogether, and do not ask if what we are being shown is human life. Sometimes it is and sometimes it is not; there is no criterion of reality; the false and the true coexist side by side, and one seems to have as legitimate a claim to be there as the other. The result is something made in equal parts of humanity and pasteboard; it is not a coherent picture of life. The *Waverley Novels* nevertheless give a marvellous picture of life; but we have to construct it by piecing them together and removing a great number of papier-mâché castles and lead knights. And even then the landscape is formless; it stretches on every side like a

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varied countryside seen from a high hill, showing fields and houses and towns, and people walking about among them; but it is not a unity like the country of *Tom Jones*: it is a land without a capital.

I do not think that anyone has ever seriously asked why, with such abundant creative genius, Scott possessed such a feeble talent for organizing his conception of life round a centre. It seems to me that the answer to this question lies in the fact that he was a Scotsman who lived in a particularly dead period of Scottish history. The world of imagination which he created was a replica of the Scotland of his time. Like that it had no capital, no centre, being a mere collection of parts without any organic internal relation to each other, since the point at which they were related lay outside themselves, that is, as far as Scotland was concerned, in London, and as far as Scott's imaginary world was concerned, probably nowhere at all. This, I feel sure, is the main and obvious reason why there is no central conception in his novels. This is also why they have all the marks of reality but significance, why there is a vacuum, a sort of Edinburgh, at the heart of them all, and why the world they describe is a mere conventional fiction; for Scotland had sunk to that state at the time. If Scott had been born an Englishman, with the same genius and the same insatiable interest in life, his work could not have remained in a half-increase state, and must have worked itself out to a unity. But he was a great writer born into a land that was no longer a nation and had not yet become a province, and the world of his imagination is a reflection of it. Perhaps, therefore, he is not to be really blamed for his faults; they may have been predetermined once and for all by his environment.

This lack of a comprehensive binding conception is, in any case, one of the things which give the *Waverley*

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Novels their peculiar atmosphere. It is felt most immediately as an emptiness; but it has also a compensating virtue, for when a real character appears in this limbo he has the force of an original creation; there is nothing to detract from or modify his human reality. The great superiority of Scott to Fielding and all other English novelists lies in his poetic power. He does not comment on society, for he did not live in one; he creates fragments of a world in a vacuum shored up with pasteboard. These fragments are mainly humorous characters who impose themselves upon us simply by the unique grace of their nature, by a spontaneous poetry which is at the same time an indispensable human quality. The endless grace of these characters can be heard in the simplest things they say, and is like a kind of music, so that it is impossible to think of them without thinking of folk-song. Take the scene in *Old Mortality* where Henry Morton tells Cuddie Headrigg, the ploughman, that he will probably have to leave Scotland and take service in some foreign army. Morton conveys this news in good stilted eighteenth-century English; but this is what it becomes in Cuddie's imagination:

And then you and me wad gang and pouss our fortunes, like the folk i' the daft auld tales about Jock the Giant-killer and Valentine and Orson; and we wad come back to merry Scotland, as the sang says, and I wad tak to the stilts again, and turn sic furs in the bonny rigs o' Milnwood holms, that it wad be worth a pint but to look at them.

That is quite beyond the reach of Fielding or Sterne. What it resembles most is those turns in Mozart's operas where bumpkins suddenly begin to sing like angels. The *Waverley Novels* are full of these exquisite changes in which the music of the characters suddenly bursts out, revealing a deep harmony of human nature, a hidden

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heaven of delight. Or take the scene where the old beggar Edie Ochiltree guides Lovel to a secret cave where he sometimes sleeps:

I have had mony a thought, that when I faund mysell auld and forfairn, and no able to enjoy God's blessed air ony langer, I wad drag mysell here wi' a pickle air-meal—and see, there's a bit bonny drapping well that popples that self-same gate simmer and winter—and I wad e'en streck mysell out here, and abide my removal, like an auld dog that trails its useless ugsome carcase into some bush or bracken, no to gi'e living things a scunner wi' the sight o't when it's dead—Ay, and then, when the dogs barked at the lone farmstead, the gudewife wad cry, "Whisht, stirra, that'll be auld Edie," and the bits o' weans wad up, puir things, and toddle to the door, to pu' in the auld Blue Gown that mends a' their bonny-dies—but there wad be nae mair word o' Edie, I trow.

There is nothing else in Scottish literature like these sudden bursts of natural music, except perhaps in some of the folk-songs. They are far beyond the reach of Burns, and have, as I have said, a touch of that pure naturalism tinged with celestial grace which we find in Mozart's operas, and particularly in *Don Giovanni*.

Scott's rarest power is shown in such passages as these, which colour all his Scottish novels; but he had also a gift for dramatic expression in the poetical style which is not often found in the English novel, except in the stories of the Brontës. He possessed this gift even when he wrote in English, a language which he always used self-consciously. There is a fine scene in *Old Mortality* where Henry Morton finds Balfour of Burley asleep. It was the morning after Burley murdered Archbishop Sharpe on Magus Moor.

Balfour was still asleep. A ray of light streamed on his uncurtained couch, and showed to Morton the working of his harsh features, which seemed agitated by some strong internal cause of disturbance. He had not undressed. Both his arms were above the bed-cover, the right hand strongly clenched, and occasionally making that abortive

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attempt to strike, which usually attends dreams of violence; the left was extended, and agitated, from time to time, by a movement of repulsing some one. The perspiration stood on his brow, "like bubbles on a late disturbed stream," and these marks of emotion were accompanied with broken words which escaped from him at intervals.—"Thou art taken, Judas—thou art taken—Cling not to my knees—cling not to my knees—hew him down!—A priest? Ay, a priest of Baal, to be bound and slain, even at the brook Kishon.—Firearms will not prevail against him—Strike—thrust with the cold iron!—put him out of pain—put him out of pain, were it but for the sake of his grey hairs."

That is not Scott at his best, for he is writing under difficulties, but the conception of the scene is in the grand dramatic style, with the rapid development leading up to the fine turn at the end: "Put him out of pain, were it but for the sake of his grey hairs". To get the full force of those dramatic scenes, however, it is necessary to choose one where Scott is partly using his own language. Perhaps the most striking of these is the scene in *The Antiquary* where Oldbuck pays a visit to the fisherman Mucklebackit on the morning after his son Steenie was lost at sea:

When he came in front of the fisherman's hut, he observed a man working intently, as if to repair a shattered boat which lay upon the beach, and, going up to him, was surprised to find it was Mucklebackit himself. "I am glad," he said, in a tone of sympathy,—"I am glad, Saunders, that you feel yourself able to make this exertion."

"And what wad ye have me to do," answered the fisher gruffly, "unless I wanted to see four children starve, because ane is drowned? It's weel wi' you gentles, that can sit in the house wi' handkerchers at your een when ye lose a friend; but the likes o' us maun to our work again, if our hearts were beating as hard as my hammer."

Without taking more notice of Oldbuck he proceeded in his labour; and the Antiquary, to whom the display of human nature under the influence of agitating passions was never indifferent, stood beside him, in silent attention, as if watching the progress of the work. He observed more than once the man's hard features, as if by the force of association, prepare to accompany the sound of the saw and hammer

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with his usual symphony of a rude tune hummed or whistled, and as often a slight twitch of convulsive expression showed that, ere the sound was uttered, a cause for suppressing it rushed upon his mind. At length, when he had patched a considerable rent, and was beginning to mend another, his feelings appeared altogether to derange the power of attention necessary for his work. The piece of wood which he was about to nail on was at first too long; then he sawed it off too short; then chose another equally ill adapted for the purpose. At length, throwing it down in anger, after wiping his dim eye with his quivering hand, he exclaimed, "There is a curse either on me or on this auld black bitch of a boat, that I have hauled up high and dry, and patched and clouted sae many years, that she might drown my poor Steenie at the end of them, an' be d——d to her!" and he flung his hammer against the boat, as if she had been the intentional curse of his misfortune. Then recollecting himself, he added: "Yet what needs ane be angry at her, that has neither soul nor sense?—though I am no that muckle better mysell. She's but a rickle o' auld rotten deals nailed thegither, and warped wi' the wind and the sea—and I am a dour carle, battered by foul weather at sea and land till I am maist as senseless as hersell. She maun be mended though again' the morning tide—that's a thing o' necessity."

All that passage, including the wonderful description of Mucklebackit's alternations of feeling, is in the style of poetic drama rather than of prose fiction, and would have to be represented on a stage to get its full effect. The perfect naturalness and measure of the pathos show Scott at his best. His tragic scenes are sometimes mismanaged, and occasionally ridiculous; but his pathetic scenes always strike one as true, and that is because he never lost sight in them of the inherent dignity of his characters, as Dickens did. Indeed he never denies their fundamental title to respect even when they are mean or evil; and he is incapable of pursuing them with hatred or overwhelming them with pity. Dickens's pathos degrades his characters, for it reduces them to mere objects, mere vessels for the reception of a maudlin cascade of emotion. The immense superiority of Scott to Dickens both as a

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writer and a man can be judged by comparing their pathetic scenes.

But Scott's poetic power is shown best of all in his creation of character, where he is above all other English novelists. In abundance and variety of creation Dickens is his greatest rival. Dickens's characters have been blamed for being caricatures, which is ridiculous, since that is their great virtue, and not a defect. His characters have also, like Scott's, a sort of poetry, but it is a poetry at one remove. Although Mr Pecksniff is a poetic creation, the poetry in him is deduced from the postulation of one or two mechanical attributes, from which all the rest follows. He is not poetic in actual conception, but only in the endless elaboration of ornament which Dickens's fancy wrought upon him. He is seen from outside with the most wonderful wit and fancy, and these give him a grotesque life, though he is really made up of a few woodenly obvious qualities, with all the others left out. Scott's characters, on the other hand, are grasped so truly in the very principle of their being that they have only to speak for us to know them. They have a harmony which no other characters in English literature have, except, perhaps, some of Shakespeare's and of Sterne's. They are not made up of a few vivid qualities, like Dickens's characters, but of all the attributes of humanity: the different mingling of these attributes being all that distinguishes them from each other. They are as various as Dickens's characters in spite of this; but they impose themselves upon us not by their oddity, but by their completeness.

It is impossible to write about Scott without mentioning his style, for it is as uncompromising as an obstacle, or rather as the succession of hurdles and water-jumps in a course before an obstacle race. All that can be said about

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it is that, no matter what it has to say, it seems resolved to say it in the dullest way possible, and in the slowest. It is a unique combination of bookishness and slovenliness. But Scott had another style, and it is not too much to say that when he used his own version of Lowland Scots he was a prose writer of the first rank. I have tried to display the poetic powers of this language; but it has also prose virtues which are as well worth studying as the English prose of the same age, splendid as that was in a different way. Consider this harangue by Bailie Nicol Jarvie:

“Wad ye bring popery in on us, and arbitrary power, and a foist and a warming pan, and the set forms, and the curates, and the auld enormities o’ surplices and cearments? Ye had better stick to your auld trade o’ theft-boot, black-mail, spreaghs, and gillravaging—better stealing nowte than ruining nations.”

Compare that with Lamb’s preciose Elizabethanisms or even De Quincey’s superbly contrived periods, and how well it comes off; how much more energetic and natural, how much nearer to the genuine prose virtues it is. It has the vigorous flavour of seventeenth-century prose and the order and clarity of modern prose at the same time. Scott’s novels are filled with superb prose such as this, a language capable of expressing the whole scale of the emotions, as well as all the variety of general reflection and argument about common experience, though unequal to the higher reaches of abstract speculation. There was no other prose of his time capable of being put to such general and wide uses. The only fault that can be advanced against it is that it was not in the main stream of tradition, and that it could be taken seriously only as dramatic dialogue, but not as a complete and self-subsistent language. And that brings us back again to the source of Scott’s weakness as a writer: that he was born

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without a nation and therefore without a self-subsistent language, because the life he knew had no centre.

It may be argued that Goethe, who was roughly contemporary with Scott, lived in an even smaller community, and yet escaped Scott's faults. But Weimar, though it was no doubt in essence a provincial town, was very different from Edinburgh; for it was the centre of an actual life. The smallness of a community certainly has sometimes an effect on the imagination of the writers it fosters, but it has not the fatal effect which is produced by not living in a community at all. When a nation is deprived of its centre, the loss is felt last of all by that part of the population which is farthest from the centre and least affected by it. This, I think, is why Scott's portraits of humble people and particularly of peasants are by far his best, just as it is the reason why the only great poet that Scotland produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a peasant who dealt with local rustic events. Scott was a more universal genius than Burns, and his genius impelled him to describe other places and other ages than the Scotland of his day—societies which had real power radiating from a real centre, such as the England of Elizabeth. But he never succeeded in doing this, and so his lasting achievement is confined to his Scottish novels, where, against a tawdry background, he has set a gallery of portraits as real as any in English literature.

HENRY ROMILLY FEDDEN

Thomas Love Peacock

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By Henry Romilly Fedden

IN one direction it is hard to define where irony hardens into satire, and in another to detect where it lapses into simple humour. Between these debatable frontiers is situated Peacockia; in its castles, halls and abbeys, satire, irony and humour hold the territory by turns. One of the intriguing things about Peacock is that this same uncertainty persists when one tries to place him historically or to fit him into any apt literary pigeon-hole.

The facts of his life are simple enough. He was born in 1785, and his literary career began in fairly easy circumstances with a period of derivative verse modelled on the late eighteenth century. Though the humourist in Peacock came out in some of his early letters, it was not until 1815 that he published *Headlong Hall*, his first characteristic work and the precursor of five other novels terminating with *Crotchet Castle* (1831). In 1820 at the age of thirty-four he married, having in the previous year found a very comfortable berth in the East India Company, where for thirty years he successfully filled posts of increasing importance. After 1831 he wrote virtually no more fiction, with the exception of *Gryll Grange* published in 1861, five years before his death.

In the barest outline of Peacock's life it is impossible not to mention the large part played by his mother. Their

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close association, a relationship which so often results in artistic activity, did not end until her death soon after the appearance of *Crotchet Castle*. Probably this loss rather than the press of business at East India House, where he had previously found time to write *Maid Marian*, *The Misfortunes of Elphin* and *Crotchet Castle*, accounts for the extraordinary lapse of three decades between the publication of these novels and the final appearance of *Gryll Grange*.

A man with a taste for sailing paper boats, who writes a tri-lingual poem on a whitebait dinner, naturally arouses a certain curiosity and interest. But Peacock's character, though delightful and individual, is not particularly complex. Shelley found him "an agreeable man and a good scholar . . . neither superstitious, ill-tempered, dogmatical or proud". Humorous, shrewd, fastidious, with something of the connoisseur and nothing of an artist's usual vanity, he appreciated his wine, his books, his family and his few friends. Though no label fits him easily, he was nearer to being a humanist than anything else. If he was often on the radical side, he yet believed with one of his characters that most opinions that have anything to be said for them are about two thousand years old. As he mellowed in East India House his tastes came to be more and more those of Dr. Opimian in *Gryll Grange*—"a good library, a good dinner, a pleasant garden and rural walks".

With the exception of two works—*Maid Marian* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin*—Peacock's novels can be conveniently treated together. *Headlong Hall*, *Melincourt*, *Nightmare Abbey*, *Crotchet Castle* and, after an interval of thirty years, *Gryll Grange*, all show an extraordinary similarity of plot, and the way in which Peacock gets his effects is the same in each. His method is simplicity itself and has been rightly called "the most drastic, the most

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economical of time and trouble ever adopted by a reputable author". He arbitrarily assembles a collection of disputatious and eccentric guests at a large country house. Having set an excellent dinner before them and circulated the madeira, their tongues are loosened to treat wittily, seriously or uproariously, in typical Peacockian dialogue of every topic under the sun. These house-parties with their varied guests and crotcheteers—mystics, bibulous parsons, craniologists, mediaevalists and perfectibilarians—are set in fine romantic scenery of an eighteenth-century sort. This situation of satire and dialogue in a romantic frame is a typical and attractive feature of the novels. To juxtapose an ironic argument between Messrs Escot and Jenkinson on the astonishing progress of civilization to a moving description of Caernarvon and Meirionnydd adds flavour, piquancy and an element of surprise that one comes to expect from Peacock.

As sentimental cement for the dialogues there is always a house-party romance loosely interwoven. With his habitual disregard for probability, "reason being in no way essential to mirth", Peacock winds the novels up by manœuvring one or two happy couples to the altar. It's easy and it's practical. However, he is really as little interested in action and situation as in probability, and there is not much of either to be found in his work. His inventive capacity was not unable to provide them, but his selective sense was too sure to include anything irrelevant to his purpose. For the same reason Peacock never wastes any time on the descriptions and character-drawing so dear to most nineteenth-century novelists. He achieves his particular effects in the simplest and most direct way. In *Crotchet Castle*, having brought Mr Chainmail to a Welsh farm-house, he asks:

Shall we describe the spacious apartment . . .—the large dark rafters,

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the pendent bacon and onions, the strong old oaken furniture, the bright and trimly arranged utensils? Shall we describe the cut of Ap-Llymry's coat, the colour and tie of his neckcloth, the number of buttons at his knees?

To our relief he decides to

leave this tempting field of expiation to those whose brains are high-pressure steam-engines for spinning prose by the furlong, to be trumpeted in paid-for paragraphs in the quack's corner of newspapers.

Peacock realized well enough that he was not trying to compete with the drab tradition of bourgeois realism as it developed in the English novel.

Peacock's work is deliciously easy reading, and for this his style is responsible. His form, the particular fashion in which he chooses to regard and disregard plot, demands a sustained crispness and perfection of treatment which he nearly always supplies. When he tried for a post at East India House, his examiner wrote at the top of his papers, "Nothing superfluous and nothing wanting". The same can be said of his prose style. He developed his own manner early and it hardly changed throughout the course of his writings. "The lightness, chastity and strength of the language" which Shelley praised in *Nightmare Abbey* are typical of all his novels. Almost any paragraph illustrates the direct, limber and faintly ironic movement of his prose:

The shuttlecock had been some time on the wing, struck to and fro with unerring aim, and to all appearances would never have touched the ground if Lord Curryfin had not seen, or fancied he saw, symptoms of fatigue on the part of his fair antagonist. He therefore, instead of returning the shuttlecock, struck it upward, caught it in his hand, and presented it to her, saying, *I give in. The victory is yours.* She answered, *The victory is yours, as it always is, in courtesy.*

Though at times such writing may appear almost too colourless and bloodless, this balance, poise and antithesis

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alone can convey the restraint and gravity of Peacock's irony.

In his dialogue this clear precision gains pungency and the purely humorous element becomes more prominent. As one approaches a passage of dialogue one reads in a state of pleasant anticipation. It is all so good that any quotation is slightly unfair. The following, however, is a fairly typical passage from *Headlong Hall*. Mr Milestone, the landscape gardener, has produced his portfolio after dinner and is showing some of the guests the various beauties of his plan for Lord Littlebrain's park:

MR MILESTONE

Here is a large rock, with the mountain ash rooted in its fissures, overgrown, as you see, with ivy and moss; and from this part of it bursts a little fountain, that runs bubbling down its rugged sides.

MISS TENORINA

O how beautiful! How I should love the melody of that miniature cascade!

MR MILESTONE

Beautiful, Miss Tenorina! Hideous. Base, common and popular. Such a thing as you may see anywhere, in wild and mountainous districts. Now, observe the metamorphosis. Here is the same rock, cut into the shape of a giant. In one hand he holds a horn, through which that fountain is thrown to a prodigious elevation. In the other is a stone, so exactly balanced as to be apparently ready to fall on the head of any person who may happen to be beneath: and there is Lord Littlebrain walking under it.

SQUIRE HEADLONG

Miraculous, by Mahomet!

MR MILESTONE

This is the summit of a hill, covered, as you perceive, with wood, and with those mossy stones scattered at random under the trees.

MISS TENORINA

What a delightful spot to read in, on a summer's day! The air

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must be so pure, and the wind must sound so divinely in the tops of those old pines!

MR MILESTONE

Bad taste, Miss Tenorina. Bad taste, I assure you. Here is the spot improved. The trees are cut down: the stones are cleared away: this is an octagonal pavilion, exactly on the centre of the summit: and there you see Lord Littlebrain, on top of the pavilion, enjoying the prospect with a telescope.

SQUIRE HEADLONG

Glorious, egad.

MR MILESTONE

Here is a rugged mountainous road, leading through impervious shades: the ass and the four goats characterize a wild uncultured scene. Here, as you perceive, it is totally changed into a beautiful gravel-road, gracefully curving through a belt of limes: and there is Lord Littlebrain driving four-in-hand.

Though no single quotation can begin to convey the atmosphere of the talk that fills these novels—witty, incisive, learned, humorous, gay—this passage does, among other things, show the pace of the dialogues. They move fast and there are no sticky patches. Further, by the use of something very near stage technique, he slips in and out of his animated conversations with the greatest possible economy of time and words. A character will begin to speak coincident with his entry. His speech itself serves to situate him satisfactorily among the other characters and is the introduction to which another author would have devoted two pages.

A mention of stage technique connects up Peacock's novels with one of their most obvious historical links, for most of his characters are "humours" in the same sense as are the stage creations of Ben Jonson and his school. Each represents some fad or crotchet upon which Peacock plays, drawing his victims out in inimitable dialogue and declamation. To give a symmetry to this scheme, his

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separate "humours" are oriented about a motivating "humour"—their hospitable host with his mania for collecting cranks around him.

To situate Peacock exactly in the history of the novel is a nice problem, for *Headlong Hall* marks the appearance of something new in English literature. Some of Peacock's own literary favourites—Aristophanes, Horace, Tacitus, Rabelais, Butler—help to give him a background. His clarity and precision link up with Tacitus, his love of good country living with his Horatian sympathies, his irony and satire with *Hudibras*, and his pure comedy with Rabelais. It is characteristic that Peacock did not care for Swift. His supreme satire, his transcending bitterness, were too disturbing for the humanist in Peacock. In *Melincourt*, one of his least successful novels, he had a situation perfectly suited to Swift's taste. The plot centres round a young philanthropist who has bought a baronetcy and a rotten borough for a mild-mannered and intelligent oran-outang. Sir Oran Haut-ton, though dumb, shows up to great advantage against the other characters, amongst whom is Anthelinda, a beautiful, cultured, principled, priggish heroine. Swift, the fundamental satirist, would have seized an obvious opportunity and made Anthelinda, for whom no suitor is good enough, fall in love with Sir Oran Haut-ton. But for Peacock this is too drastic, it would upset his peace of mind and the tenor of the party assembled at Melincourt. He pursues his comico-ironic vein and brings Anthelinda at last to the arms of her philanthropist. Nothing can illustrate quite as clearly the gulf between Peacock and the out and out satirist of Swift's type.

The influence of Anthony Hamilton and the French eighteenth century has often been noted in the manner of Peacock's novels, in their polished descriptive passages,

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their pointed self-sufficient dialogue, and the author's reticence about his own viewpoint. Peacock's conviction that the great comic authors of the past had subordinated character to ideas and had treated of opinions rather than of persons, throws an interesting sidelight not only on his debt, but on his attitude, to a man like Voltaire. He differs, however, too obviously and fundamentally from the French eighteenth century for one to be able to push this parallel home. He is more humorous, more comic and easy-going, and, though no less polished, his prose lacks the particular "bite" of the salons.

In spite of the fact that *Headlong Hall* did not appear until 1815, it is difficult to find anyone who could have influenced Peacock after the turn of the century. The truth is that his contemporaries were on a different tack. Jane Austen is the single exception. Three of her novels had been published before 1815, and it would be interesting to know if Peacock had seen them. As stylists both share the same precision and clarity, and both employ the same special brand of irony. This similarity is given point by the fact that Meredith, the only subsequent writer who is largely in debt to Peacock, also owes something to Jane Austen, and it is interesting to find Mr E. V. Lucas saying that "for ironical humour Miss Austen's only peer among the novelists is George Meredith".

Whether or not it is possible to establish a literary relationship between Jane Austen and Peacock, that between Peacock and his son-in-law Meredith is very close. As a young man the latter knew Peacock; his tastes had not yet set and he was naturally influenced by the older novelist. It is not unfair to say that Meredith owes to him that particular blend of romantic narrative and ironic intellectual comedy which is typical of his novels. Meredith's own definition of comedy is almost a summary of Pea-

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cock's method. "The comic spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech." The epigrammatic social irony in a typical Peacockian sentence, such as "He has a rotten borough, for the sake of which he sells his daughter, that he may continue to sell his country", is echoed by Meredith in a subtler, less direct form.

Peacock, however, satirizes himself in a way that Meredith never did. The latinisms that he indulges in from time to time, his copious footnotes, the seriousness into which he is sometimes to be caught lapsing, all consciously poke fun at "Old Peacock" the author. He has also a vein of direct buffoonery which Meredith was too complex a writer to attempt, and he does not choose the butts for his satire with the same justness or discrimination. However, it seems to matter very little whether Peacock's irony falls on the just or the unjust. The execution and the manner are so perfect that his mark is irrelevant.

For the same reason it is quite unnecessary to know whom Peacock is baiting in the character of Mr Flosky, Mr Cypress or Lord Facing-both-ways. Though it is obviously a help to know that they represent Coleridge, Byron and Lord Brougham, it is not essential. That is why Peacock's irony does not date. One can appreciate his work without a knowledge of the ideas or persons satirized. It remains fresh, whether or not Scythrop in *Nightmare Abbey* is a partial caricature of Shelley. Too much emphasis is, in fact, laid both on the contemporary element in Peacock's novels and on his friendship with Shelley. His attachment to a poet so eminently humourless was one of those odd personal relationships between opposites and can hardly have had any influence on the novelist in Peacock.

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Of his "novels of talk" it is not easy or even necessary to give a detailed analysis. With the exception of *Melincourt*, they are all short and can be read in an hour or so. They all include the accepted Peacockian house-party formula with its pleasant atmosphere, brilliant dialogue and romantic setting. Even the characters conform to certain types. The Rev. Dr. Gasper of *Headlong Hall* develops into the Rev. Dr. Folliott of *Crotchet Castle*, and in *Gryll Grange* we find him for the last time as the mellow Dr. Opimian. The obscurantist transcendental, patterned on Coleridge, makes similar appearances as Mr Panscope, Mr Mystic and Mr Flosky. So it is with a majority of the characters. It is their conversation, always witty, fresh and unexpected, that creates them new and different on each occasion.

Gryll Grange, the last of these novels, is the only one that shows any difference in treatment. It is overweighted with a burden of classical reference and quotation which, even if subtly ironic by intention, is too much for any reader. The tempo is slower, more that of the ordinary novel, and, coincident with an attempt at greater reality, at situating Peacockia in the real world, there is a devastating sentimentality which is far from ironic. For the first time in Peacock's novels one finds a certain amount of pure character-drawing—as in the rather charming portrait of Miss Niphet—and psychological complexities begin to trouble the guests at Gryll Grange. In the long interval which preceded the publication of *Gryll Grange* the English novel had been developing. Thackeray had written nearly all his work, and in *Fraser's Magazine*, to which Peacock had been contributing and which he must have read, George Eliot had published *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Though the concessions made in *Gryll Grange* are small enough, they show some attempt to keep pace with

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all this. The result is not happy. The dialogue misses in succinctness more than the novel gains in characterization. Peacock was now an old man and, for all the charm of *Gryll Grange*, his manner has lost virility.

As opposed to his "novels of talk" Peacock wrote two tales, *Maid Marian* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. The first is Peacock's only failure and can be regarded as a tentative effort in the manner which produced the second masterpiece. In *The Misfortunes of Elphin* the clear prose style remains the same and the satire is still there—if anything in a graver, more ironic and penetrating form—but the dialogue which characterizes the usual Peacockian novel has disappeared. The story combines and telescopes various Welsh legends, and its satiric intent brings into unexpected unity the court of King Arthur, the inundation of Gwytho's kingdom and a succession of incident. Peacock's affinity with the French eighteenth century is closest in this work, and there is a definite parallel between *Candide* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. The best thing in the book is the famous character of Prince Seithenyn. As Warden of the Embankment that keeps out the sea from Gwytho's dominions he is a terrific Pantagruelian figure, and at the same time an open and continuous satire on the opposition to parliamentary reform. He is a real creation, and everything he says has the Rabelaisian ring of gigantic foolishness and wisdom. His best scene is where Elphin, King Gwytho's son, visits him as he feasts in his hall upon the embankment. The opening passages are too good not to quote:

"Prince Seithenyn," said Elphin, "I have visited you on a subject of deep moment. Reports have been brought to me that the embankment, which has been so long entrusted to your care, is in a state of dangerous decay."

"Decay," said Seithenyn, "is one thing, and danger is another. Everything that is old must decay. That the embankment is old, I

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am free to confess; that it is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny; that it is any the worse for that, I do most sturdily gainsay. It does its business well: it works well: it keeps out the water from the land, and it lets in the wine upon the High Commissioner of Embankment. Cupbearer, fill. Our ancestors were wiser than we: they built it in their wisdom; and, if we should be so rash as to try to mend it, we should only mar it."

"The stonework," said Teithrin, "is sapped and mined: the piles are rotten, broken, and dislocated: the flood-gates and sluices are leaky and creaky."

"That is the beauty of it," said Seithenyn. "Some parts of it are rotten, and some parts are sound."

"It is well," said Elphin, "that some parts are sound: it were better that all were so."

"So I have heard some people say before," said Seithenyn; "perverse people, blind to venerable antiquity: that very unamiable sort of people who are in the habit of indulging their reason. But I say, the parts that are rotten give elasticity to those that are sound: they give them elasticity, elasticity, elasticity. There is nothing so dangerous as innovation. . . . This immortal work has stood for centuries, and will stand for centuries more, if we let it alone. It is well: it works well: let well alone. Cupbearer, fill. It was half rotten when I was born, and that is a conclusive reason why it should be three parts rotten when I die."

Though Seithenyn appears too rarely, he dominates the book. His rediscovery at the court of King Melvas, after the destruction of the embankment, is typical: "plying his potions with undiminished energy, while the heroes of the festival dropped round him, like the leaves in autumn".

When one has read Peacock, appreciated his style and the sureness of his irony, something still remains unelucidated. Unlike his own characters with the madeira beside them, one cannot "Fill and explain". Oddly enough, however, one may fairly single out his financial circumstances as a decisive factor in determining his purely personal quality and charm. Having a sufficient private income and being later in life definitely "well-off", he was enabled to ignore the *reading public*, of whom he had

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the lowest opinion, and to mould his style and create his plots in his own way. Peacock is one of the aristocrats of letters, of whom there are unfortunately so few. He belongs to the small and select band who have written for their own pleasure without either the depressing middle-class desire to move mountains or the anxious wish to capture markets. Peacock was a great amateur, interested in writing and gifted with a special perception of the *ludicrum humani generis*. Hence the unique enjoyment he can give and the sense of piquancy and recreation one finds on every page. He never bores, never proselytizes, and he is never nervous. His novels are written with a self-sufficiency that can even be slightly annoying. He presumes in his readers a certain culture, a certain *intelligence de la vie*, and a sense of humour. If they lack the equipment to appreciate his novels, he infers that the loss is theirs.

Unlike Sterne, he takes his liberties self-confidently; it is unnecessary for him to "sell", and his reader's cooperation is of no importance. Knowing the world's limitations and his own, his mantle sits easily and he does not take a sacerdotal bard-like attitude to writing. A stylist, a wit and an amateur, he merely repeats his signature; yet the result in each case is a minor masterpiece—a *Headlong Hall* or a *Crotchet Castle*.

And, best of all, these intriguing mansions are situated safely in the heart of Peacockia. That is Peacock's great point. He has his own world as much as Dickens, a fantastic place, strangely unreal and yet strangely serious. There characters behave with an immunity for which one has always longed. They are rude over the port and yet are not rapped over the knuckles. No action brings its inevitable consequence, and when a love-lorn Scythrop calls for "a pint of port and a pistol", one knows he will

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only have occasion to use the first. Nevertheless, in the mould that Peacock has given them, the mermaid of Mr Asterias, Mr Falconer's maidens, the skull of Cadwallader, everything that is said and thought, assume a vast importance and preposterous reality. Even the conviviality, the unfailing foundation of good food and good company upon which the novels rest, has an epic, half-Homeric quality. The dinner-table is the centre of the Peacockian world; there the characters gather and there the inimitable dialogues go forward, while Peacock pushes about the bottle. Deteriorationist and mystic, Sir Oran Haut-ton and the parson alike must moisten their lungs with wine, "for all things thirst beneath his ray".

SEÁN O'FAOLÁIN

Dickens and Thackeray

DICKENS AND THACKERAY

By Seán O'Faoláin

I

THERE never was and never will be a final judgement on any writer. All that is possible is a contemporary judgement, since there never was and never will be a critic who does not see the wood of the past through the wood of the present, and centuries are always either mutually antagonistic or naturally partial. With that apology for anything harsh that one may be inclined to say of Dickens, and with the confession that as a reader's novelist he is sufficiently a master to be beyond criticism, it must be said that, as a novelist's novelist, he is fallen on evil days—he is now at any rate a master without pupils. There is no question of our losing anything by this. It is simply a matter of times that do not match. Whether or not there will come a time when Dickens will influence other writers does not concern us. All we know or care to know is that he does not influence anybody now.

This is not merely because he was so personal in his triumph as to be inimitable, but because objectivity has given way to subjectivity, description to analysis, and acceptance to revolt, because we are in search of a new synthesis, a different wisdom, because the whole emphasis has shifted from common sense to individual sense; because since his day art has become a religion and every

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artist has as many airs and as much pride as an aristocrat. In his secret heart every modern writer would like to despise the Big Public, and a great part of the explanation of the fact that literature is none the less at a comparatively low standard is that Big Public approval today offers such prizes that few can be independent of it. Something of the same sort of thing happened to Dickens; and novelists will never condescend to learn from a best-seller.

This simply means that Dickens was not in the modern and rather priggish sense an "artist", for which we may be deeply grateful and proceed to rejoice in the results of his lack of "art". But it is not a highbrow attitude, nor is it as stupid as it might seem, since in essence it is nothing but a deep regard for integrity. It is a mixture of puritanism, intellectual snobbery, and resentment against a lack of exclusive devotion to the Muse. The only kind of writer who has any influence on other writers is either the lesser man who failed to exploit to the full a half-perceived idea, as in the case of Dujardin and Joyce, or the aristocrat of letters who would have gone to the guillotine of oblivion for a book. Writers must have their martyrs and their heroes as well as everybody else. Dickens was neither. Of the two, Thackeray and Dickens, writers are the more likely to learn from Thackeray, who was both a snob of books, and one of those who half-perceived a liberty of which his successors perceived the full possibilities.

II

The main quality of the English novel is its grand balance of feeling and intelligence—Fielding, Defoe, Smollett, Thackeray, Trollope, Dickens. Always there is feeling. A sense of life and its endless interest, a humanity, a restrained sympathy, even a breeziness near to vulgarity

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—the number of scenes in the English novel dealing with eating and drinking are extraordinary. It is eminently a social document, and wherever you find aberrants from the tradition you will find that they were solitaries in whom there is an excess either of feeling or intelligence: or in whom other untraditional, but not, of course, alien qualities preponderate over feeling and intelligence. The Brontës, for example, who had imaginations fostered in excess by their isolation—or rather Emily, and, apart from *Shirley*, Charlotte—are complete aberrants from the main English tradition. So is Hardy, and it is significant that in each of these three there is a touch of outlandish blood that is not quite yeoman. Jane Austen, too, in whom intelligence is all-powerful, has no imitators in the main stream of the English novel. The sentimentalists, Sterne and Richardson, are generally, I think, regarded by English critics as outside the main stream, even as to me certainly Barrie is an infusion, not a growth.

Feeling, restrained but warm, then, is the natural hallmark of nineteenth-century fiction. The one thing, Emily Brontë apart, that it does not possess in excess or has never sought to exploit is emotion: that belongs to the Irish or the Russians. Rarely—Meredith and Jane Austen aside—has it exploited its restraining element and become analytical, tempering sensibilities with intelligence as finely as the French.

Now, to speak of Dickens as an aberrant would be absurd—he is too full of genuine feeling for that. But we have all observed that his feeling, or sentiment, goes over at the slightest excuse into sentimentality which is felt as a disproportion of feeling—embarrassing as an ornate but gimcrack gift. And we have observed, too, that the only thing that prevents him from sentimentalizing all the time is his immense gusto, showing itself as a powerful sense of

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humour which is really a frolicking enjoyment of life, or as a powerful imagination which burns up every dross—both of them releasing him from that terrible social inhibition from which he suffered throughout his career, a complete lack of taste. In these two respects, gusto and imagination, he is the Dickens whom we all love, and what we love in him is his excess—the only thing in life or in letters that appeals to all writers, say what they will. In those two respects we see him approach the great aberrants of the English tradition, those outstanding ones who may not, so to speak, be as sound as the main procession but who are better than it—Emily Brontë, Sterne, Jane Austen, Meredith, undoubtedly Hardy, probably Lawrence, possibly Joyce—the novelist's novelists.

But we do not actually class him with these, straight-way and wholeheartedly, because he was not wholehearted himself, and we never know the moment he will betray us. He is often, frankly, disloyal to his Craft.

We know that he wrote for his public—his dear, darling Public—and that the reliable novelist writes for himself, even as we know that all great literature has a quality of being overheard, not announced. It is an exaggeration, but it is at bottom true. You read *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for instance, and you adore the man who created Pecksniff, and Mark Tapley, and Tom Pinch, and Sary Gamp and Chevy Slyme, and you wish you could do anything even a hundredth part as good. And then you come to Eden and that truly shocking piece of flummery the reform of Martin, and you begin to feel uncomfortable. You have held the good old gentleman's purse while he went around the corner: now he has gone around the corner with yours, and you are waiting for him to come back. . . . You need never feel like that about Thackeray; he may be

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a bore and a prig but he will never deliberately play you false.

III

Only writers who live their art, not play on it, affect other writers, or at any rate young writers for whom, as yet, ideals are more important than anything else. One feels that Dickens wanted to live his art, but would not. One feels that the real Dickens was the big-eyed solitary child who made his soul in the blacking-factory and saw the Golden Gates from the top of Bayham Street in Camden town where, across the docks and the dust in the fields, the cupola of Saint Paul's loomed out of the smoke. One feels that the poetry of life held him, then, intact and complete, or when he was—his own words—"supremely happy" in the macabre gloom of Covent Garden or Seven Dials, with wild visions of prodigies of wickedness and want and beggary arising in his mind as he looked about him. More than one critic has found the real Dickens in the adult version of that solitary child, and all his faeryland as a grotesque remaking of the bizarre ideas dilating behind those wondering eyes—a remembering of a magic that really never existed in fact and which gives us Pol Sweedlepipe for his uncle's decent barber in Dean Street, Soho, and Doctor Slammer for the old staff-doctor at Chatham, and Micawber for his father, and the odd bookseller in Copperfield for a quite normal bookseller in Hampstead Road, that gives us all the Blennams and Duftys and Duddles and Tuzzers and Meagles and Foggys and Boffins and Blodgetts (of his notebooks and his books) for perfectly unexciting people who would never have recognized themselves in his fantastications. One feels that it is all *invented* by him—that he is not, in a word, in the least a realist but an utter fantaisiste.

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Yet, with such power has he impressed his poet's vision of his world on us that it is doubtful, now, if we shall ever be able to see his times clear of his remaking of them. So, after his pen had set to work the modern Christmas Card came in with the snow and the coaching-inn and the red robins—his faeryland, and it troubles us not at all that nine times out of ten there is only a dreary drizzle of rain at Christmas. He has made the poetry of the winter-fire and the creaking inn-sign so vivid and so inseparable a part of English life that today in the United States, wherever you meet people who have an affection for their roots, you get perfectly gratuitous ingle-nook fireplaces in centrally-heated apartment-houses, and there is hardly a village in America without its inn-sign and its Ye Olde Curiositie Shoppe. Who minds? Not the realists, certainly, since it has nothing to do with realism. It is enough that when he is writing in that vein Dickens is living his vision of life, living in his dream-world, locked against all the envy of time in the Quilp Castle of his bizarre and macabre imagination, the complete artist.

Looking at him, so, we know that he could do anything while he followed that star. But there is no novelist but knows that a dream-world must be related in some way to life, and no critic but knows that more artists than have ever been heard of have gone out like a candle in that delicate process of attempting to make their dream-worlds persuasive. One look at Tennyson, say, trying in *The Princess* to tune his lyric pipe to the boom of contemporary ideas on education and the Rights of Woman, is enough to show us how the tragedy happens. It is the most delicate part of the novelist's craft, and the pit that faces him is called *The Commonplace*.

Dickens was great when he followed his star with abandon, and his only—and quite astute and wise—compromise

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was to go back a little out of his times to days that were already becoming mellow by being past, the coaching days. But for the rest he took his world and moulded it like putty in the claws of his wildly romantic imagination. As long as he did that he is simply without peer. When he came down to fundamentals, however, like Tennyson in that dull, dull poem *In Memoriam*, full of commonplace triteness—if you are shocked go to it again and see for yourself—Dickens hitched his star to the wagon of conventional thought and conventional morality, one of the shakiest wagons ever known. He became the novelist of bourgeois thought, and in the musty drawing-room with its plush overmantel and its lace curtains he lay side by side with the family Bible on the plush table-cover. He became the creature of his times—Hard Times.

In the result even his qualities suffered. He who was a poet and a solitary by nature became prosy with mechanical universals, bespoke philosophies, and a painful cocksureness about imponderables. He who was fancy-bred could smell, even in his humour, of stuffed-heart. I possibly put myself out of court by saying that I cannot, on my heart, agree that *Pickwick* is anything but a slow, tedious book by a great humourist, even though it *has* incomparable interludes like Bardwell *v.* Pickwick. But, again, retest it with Mr Winkle on the Ice, or the Shooting Expedition, and all that about the fat boy supplying fat food to a fat man, and say if, in honesty, you do not sigh for childhood memories broken by a re-perusal. Worst of all, he, who had seen Evil face to face, was content to call it Injustice and plead for reform with every air of smug content that the world would again in time, with the help of Dickens, become a jolly good place to live in. No, as if he were too dynamic to be daemonic, he had no Vision of Sin, and was satisfied that with his stuffed images

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out of a Chamber of Horrors, the claptrap, gentlemanly claptrap, of a man who knew the facts but would not face them, he had adequately presented his whores and fences and sharks and pimps. He, who could express his pity for humanity as no man ever did before him, would not as much as look at the light of hell in human beings or the impenetrable darkness of their souls. Read *Quilp*—a scarecrow for children. Finally, because he had not a trace of humility in him, he wrote as if he knew everything, and there is, as a result, no wisdom in him but the wisdom of Samuel Smiles. He is, in short, the great comforter of the nineteenth century, and unhappily for him the nineteenth century is gone. The farther it goes the more will his reputation decline, and the higher will the reputation of Thackeray become, though—because Dickens *was* immense—it is unlikely if they will, even at that, ever meet.

Whereas Thackeray is not at all to the same extent sold to his times. The man who wrote a Novel without a Hero and almost made a heroine of Becky Sharp, is—whatever he may think—near enough to Maupassant who made a heroine out of Boule de Suif, to be company for Turgenev or Flaubert: possibly not very good company and they would have quizzed him a great deal, but let that pass. He is no aberrant—he had not the forcefulness for it—he was too much of the commune, but he did do what Hardy did and Lawrence did: he slapped smug English morality in the face. True, he did it so gently they hardly noticed; indeed he hardly knew himself what he had done, for it was a little gentlemanly slap. But he did it just the same, and the proof of it is in the dedication to *Jane Eyre* and in the protests and the dirty stories of the shocked Victorians who read that book.

Even if one says that in so far as Dickens was a grand

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exponent of the nineteenth-century traditional novel all who are of that tradition must be indebted to him—it is not entirely true. He pushed down no fences in the traditional fort, expanded its limitations in no effective way; rather he took the fort by storm, planted his flag in it, and if anything left his successors little to conquer. He took the technique of the English novel, its loose narrative style, its interest in various life, in character seen by-and-large, and even its long interest in rogues and ragamuffins, adapted it to his material, and blew fantastic life into it out of his mouth. But he did it as a glassblower who blows out magic with traditional tools and who says when you ask him how he does it, "How do I do it? I just blows." He had no imitators because he was inimitable at his best, and at his second-best what was imitable in his work was equally available outside it. Journalists did seize on his style; in his *Portraits of the Sixties*, Justin McCarthy remembers hearing London editors complaining humorously about the Dickensian craze, so that if an editor asked some reporter to do a description of a big public ceremonial he was sure to get something like: "Seats everywhere. Seats outside the Abbey. Seats inside the Abbey. Seats in Palace Yard. Seats in Piccadilly. Seats in High Holborn . . ." and so on for a half-column before there began anything like a plain and practical account in intelligible prose. But otherwise . . .

IV

There is no greater critical folly than that of wishing a great writer was other than he was, and nobody need wish it for Dickens. That Mark Twain might have been better if he had not been inhibited by his times and his wife is true: it is also true that he might have been worse.

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It suffices that he wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, and it suffices that Dickens wrote a dozen of them. Achievement is all. Dickens peopled the England of his day with the loveliest, most amusing, most touching, most fantastic hobgoblins and elves imaginable, giants and dwarfs, good fairies and bad. Among them he threw a few highly creditable but incredible Oberons and Rosalinds. And his world shuddered and wept and laughed at the *reality* of them as a child might laugh or shudder with delight and joy at the lifelike figures in Madame Tussaud's. Even Jeffrey, that crusted Whig reviewer, blubbered over "sweet Paul".

I have said it is foolish to wish a writer was other than he was, but one may wish a public different, and if only the public of Dickens' day had the wit to take literature for literature's sake, which is to say for the sake of its charm and delight and awe, and not for edification's sake, how much better could he not have served them with fun and fear. But who are we to wish a public different? His public did him the grace of taking him seriously, even solemnly. While in our day the public, by making a giant of so many, insisting indeed on "giants only" as its motto, ends by taking nobody seriously. But even that wish about Dickens' public is stupid. They took Tennyson seriously enough, Heaven knows, and a nice mess they made of that delicate lyric poet—as Mr Harold Nicolson gives us room to believe in his excellent biography. And they took Mark Twain lightly enough, too, and that prose lyricist went buffoon and thwarted his seriousness, as Mr Van Wyck Brooks argues in another excellent biography. It all ends in the balance between the heart of the writer and the opportunities of his times. If Dickens lived in our bitter day one wonders what would happen to his humour—and if he had lived in the eighteenth century,

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one wonders what would have happened to his romance—and one ends by believing that he made an excellent bargain with his own difficult age.

But it is not our age, and we have to make a bargain of our own in our way, that is not, and could not be his way. We have broken with tradition both in literature and in life, and if we are to receive any inspiration it will not be from him. It will be from those who broke with tradition before and after him, those individual wanderers out of the orderly procession in which he, like a general, brings up the rear—those scouts and guerillas of the disorganized rebellion of our times.

E. F. BENSON

The Brontës

THE BRONTËS

By E. F. Benson

CONSIDERING how almost completely eventless were their lives, the children of the Rev. Patrick Brontë have been the subject of more minute and enthusiastic research than any mortal family which ever existed. It is true that in one small room in Haworth Parsonage were written three masterpieces of fiction, but that does not account for the insatiable curiosity that the smallest details of their lives continue to arouse eighty years after the last of them died at the age of thirty-eight. To account for this we must look not to their writings alone, but to the strange and tragic circumstances in which their books were produced (and with which those books were intimately connected) and to the arresting individuality of these very diverse young people.

Omitting the two other children who died in childhood, the eldest was Charlotte. Physically she was tiny (Miss Harriet Martineau described her as the smallest creature she had ever seen except at a fair), she was very plain, she was abnormally shy, disconcertingly silent, without a touch of geniality or humour, censorious and harsh in her judgement of others, possessed of an unwavering trust in God and of an indomitable courage, and capable of both giving and inspiring profound affection and love. Next came Branwell. As a boy he showed the most brilliant promise of them all. He died at the age of thirty-one, a worn-out, dissolute drunkard and drug-taker. For three

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years before his death Charlotte frankly detested him and avoided speaking to him or being in the room with him if she could possibly help it. Then came Emily, in comparison with whom Charlotte was a chatterbox. Under that silence burned the fire of pure genius. She wrote one novel, and died at the age of thirty. Anne, the youngest, was gentle and pious. She wrote two novels, and neither she nor they would have aroused the slightest interest had she not been the sister of her sisters. She died at the age of twenty-nine.

All four of them scribbled voluminously before they were in their teens: romances and poems poured from their infant pens. Their mother died when Charlotte was only five years old, and her sister, Miss Elizabeth Branwell, came from Penzance to these bleak moors of Yorkshire to look after them. She lived chiefly in her bedroom, took snuff and wore pattens in the house. Their father was the son of an Irish peasant farmer. His real name was Brunty, and he had managed (no one knows how) to get a University education. He wrote two romantic novels and two books of poems, all of which he managed to get published. They are quite unreadable. The incomparable Tabby, helped by the girls, did the entire work of the house. It was a very small Parsonage on the edge of the moors, with two sitting-rooms, one of which was Mr Brontë's study: the other served as sitting-room and dining-room for the rest of the family, and there, as children and to the end of their lives, they planned and wrote their books.

All four of them while still hardly out of their teens took situations as tutor and governesses. The girls detested these situations, and came back for their holidays to the grim little Parsonage as if to Paradise. Two of them, Charlotte and Anne, brought back with them copy for

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future use. Then Charlotte determined that, with the aim of herself and her sisters fitting themselves to open a boarding-school for girls at the Parsonage, she and Emily should finish their education at the *pensionnat* kept by Madame Héger at Brussels, and there befell her the utter misery and the unspeakable enrichment of falling in love with M. Constantin, Madame Héger's husband. She came back to Haworth, and with her sisters sent out the prospectuses of "the Misses Brontës' establishment for the Board and Education of a limited number of Young Ladies". Not a single young lady offered herself. Had the school ever come into existence, it is more than possible that the Brontës would never have been heard of: their time and energies would have been consumed in scholastic instruction. Somebody, after Ellen Nussey's death, might have painfully deciphered a quantity of letters to her from the headmistress of a small girls' school at Haworth. Interesting, strangely vivid, of a fiery quality. But where was the use of keeping them?

The idea of the school was given up for there were no pupils. Branwell had been dismissed from his post of tutor at Thorp Green, where Anne was governess, owing to some improper behaviour towards his employer's wife, and was at home drinking heavily. There was no sort of prospect in view for any of them.

In 1845 Charlotte discovered some poems by Emily and read them: she thought them "condensed and terse". Anne produced some of hers, and Charlotte found in them "a sweet sincere pathos". She hunted up others of her own, and eventually the poems of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell were published at the authors' expense. The book fell flatter than Edward FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyám: only two copies were sold. But the old flame, the desire to write, was kindled again. "Ill-

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success", said Charlotte, "failed to crush us, the mere effort to succeed had given a wonderful zest to existence." The three sisters turned to prose, and two of them achieved immortality.

Each set to work on a novel. Charlotte wrote *The Professor*, and Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights*. Anne was already engaged on a story called *Passages in the Life of an Individual*: its title was altered to *Agnes Grey*. For a year and a half publisher after publisher was given his chance, but the packages, with a curt word, continued to return to the Parsonage. Yet even while this unrelieved discouragement was going on, Charlotte began on another novel called *Jane Eyre*, and Anne on *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. At length something happened. The publisher T. C. Newby accepted *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, while *The Professor* was still being consistently refused. Charlotte was really lucky in that, for it was a very mediocre performance and it was not published till after her death. She put it back into the stock-pot and let it simmer. There was good stuff in it, and simmering was just what it needed.

Then came her turn. Her second novel, *Jane Eyre*, was accepted by Messrs Smith Elder & Co., and was the first of the Brontë novels to appear. It had an instant success not only with the general public but with the lights and leaders of the literary world. The plot was ludicrous in the highest degree, but it was exciting; the story was very well told and it had the qualities of a best-seller in any age. But there was far more to it than that: it was new and startling and of prodigious power. The heroine, who was also the narrator, was no stock early Victorian maiden, all sweetness and prettiness and virginal shyness. She was a small plain governess eighteen years old, who without a qualm looked after the illegitimate daughter of her

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employer. His maniac wife lived under the same roof and was attended by a stalwart kitchen-maid, frequently drunk. The house resounded with her demoniac screams, she tried to burn her husband in his bed, but she had no official existence. Rochester and Jane Eyre fell in love with each other, and their marriage service had already begun when the maniac's brother and lawyer stopped it. Rochester then proposed that Jane Eyre should be his mistress, but she refused and ran away. Penniless and exhausted, she dropped fainting on the threshold of the house of some first-cousins of whose existence she was unaware, and found that her uncle had died, leaving her £20,000. Throughout the book coincidences, extravagancies, lurid and didactic passages abound, but who cares? The point is that the little plain governess is a creature of fire and high romance and actuality. Charlotte herself lives and burns in its pages. She described as perhaps no woman ever did before or since not a man's passion for a woman, but a woman's passion for a man in its very essence, unmixed with physical desire. She was talking of what she knew "to the inmost fibre of her being". . . . She set down much in malice: that was as vivid as the rest; and she was delighted when Lowood, where Jane Eyre suffered miseries as a child, was identified with Cowan Bridge where she and Emily and her elder sisters had been at school. The whole book was alive with personal experience and reverberated with authentic emotion. It might have been safely predicted that Jane Eyre could find nothing to admire in the novels of Jane Austen when Mr G. H. Lewes exhorted her to appreciate them. Accurate daguerreotyped portraits of commonplace people.

Jane Eyre was in the first flush of its success when, in December 1847, *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* were

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published. *Wuthering Heights* sold in moderate numbers, but attracted no critical attention at all. The construction of it, the changes of narrator from Lockwood, who opens the book in the first person, to Nellie Dean, who narrates the bulk of it to him, and the change back again to Lockwood, who resumes his narrative, are inconceivably awkward. The relationships between Earnshawes and Lintons and Heathcliffs would baffle a professional genealogist. First steps towards certain developments are made and then retraced. Some of these awkwardnesses are amply accounted for if we accept the supposition, which has very strong evidence to support it, that Branwell wrote the first two chapters. They are atrocious in pomposity and pretentiousness, and resemble in a most remarkable manner the stilted style in which he habitually wrote to his friends. But none of these defects (it was the first novel Emily wrote and the last) touch the supreme genius of the book. It resembles nothing else in English fiction (though there are curious parallels between it and Dostoevsky's novels and Wagner's *Ring*) and is second to nothing in the fiction of the world. Heathcliff and the elder Catherine, though human in speech and aspect, are primæval and elemental forces, kin to the moorland and its storms. Catherine, like Brynhilde, mates with a mortal, but she is not mortal herself. Her true mate is Heathcliff, and both are of a race apart. At the close of their troubled incarnation they pass again into the mystical communion with Nature which Emily tells of in her poems as something so nearly attained by herself. But never quite: on the very threshold of initiation the material begins to make itself felt against the psychical, "the soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain". Anyone who attempts to criticize *Wuthering Heights* must do so from this transcendental standpoint. The author herself

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felt the impossibility of rendering in definite words that which could never be expressed. She frees them from the flesh, and through her narrator she concludes:

I lingered round there under that benign sky, watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered that anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

Charlotte could make as little of Emily's book as she could make of Jane Austen's. *Jane Eyre* was based on acute observation and on her own emotional experiences. She was shocked and bewildered. Attempting to defend the book, she said that "the worst of it was" that Heathcliff's spirit "seems breathed through the whole narrative in which he figures". But exactly that was the whole glory and eminence of the book! She thought that "Ellis (Emily) will not be seen in his full strength till he is seen as an essayist". She missed all that *Wuthering Heights* stands for. After Emily's death she wrote: "Had she but lived, her mind would have grown like a strong tree, loftier, straighter, wider-spreading, and its matured fruits would have attained a mellower ripeness and sunnier fruit". Catherine was "not destitute of a certain strange beauty in her fierceness or of honesty in the midst of her perverted passion and passionate perversity". She tried to find the faint reflection of Christian virtues in Heathcliff; she might as well have sought them in Pan fluting in the thickets. In fact Charlotte's magnificent talents implied an incomprehension of *Wuthering Heights*: her very power demanded it. She presently proved that herself.

Anne published two novels. There is nothing to be said about the first, *Agnes Grey*; Charlotte justly called it the mirror of Anne's mind. But the inspiration for the second, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, is interesting, for it was written from a sense of duty. She had observed the

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awful deterioration of her brother. From being a brilliant boy he had become a drunken monomaniac, scarcely sane. She studied him closely and knew that it was laid upon her to reproduce every detail of his ruin as a warning to others. In this, gentle Anne was firmness itself. She felt it would be mere self-indulgence to refrain from her task. She persevered with it, and her publisher was offered a high price for it in America as being a new work by the author of *Jane Eyre*. The two sisters undeceived him, and I do not think it was published in America at all. Anne has no independent existence as a novelist.

Before Charlotte finished her next book both her sisters and her brother had died. As before in *Jane Eyre*, she used living models for her characters, but in *Shirley* there is not that white-hot, welding, emotional consciousness that made the other a masterpiece. She made scathing caricatures of various of her father's curates, but they were quite irrelevant to her story. These amiable young men could not help recognizing themselves, but instead of being scarified, as Charlotte had intended, they took it as a screaming joke. Mr Nicholls (whom she subsequently married) laughed so much that his landlady thought he had gone wrong in the head, and he read all the curate scenes aloud to her papa. She put in the whole family of her friends the Taylors; the Rev. H. M. Heald was Cyril Hall. Such figures (some as ludicrous as "Baroness Ingram of Ingram Hall") might have formed an amusing background to a book of light comedy or even of serious fiction, if they had had anything to do with the theme. But when we come to Shirley Keeldar there is nothing there. Charlotte intended Shirley to be the full-length portrait of her sister Emily, but she had understood Emily no more than she had understood *Wuthering Heights*.

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Externally she reproduced Emily with her musings over a pool on the moor, with her refusal to admit she was ill, with her cauterizing the bite of a dog with a red-hot poker; but of Emily herself, of her pantheistic mysticism, of the inspiration that came "with that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars", of the dawn of the invisible, there is no trace. Charlotte observed her wholly from the outside and never got near the heart of her. Even if we disregard Charlotte's intention altogether and look on Shirley as a creation, her mysticism is purely rhetorical. Charlotte, though deeply religious, had no touch of the mystic about her, and in Shirley's rhapsody ("Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills") she only hides a blank wall with a purple patch. Or how would a girl like Emily have accepted and returned the devotion of her lover? This is how Shirley does it:

"Mr. Moore, your judgment is well-balanced; your heart is kind; your principles are sound. I know you are wise; I feel you are benevolent; I believe you are conscientious. Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant, be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always."

All very proper: Jane Austen might have written that with a faint ironical smile. But Charlotte wrote it with deep seriousness. In *Shirley* she had no inner perception of what she was writing about, and therefore it is not in the same class as *Jane Eyre*.

Charlotte was bitterly wounded by the unfriendly criticism with which the book was received; but indeed one cannot wonder that there was great disappointment at this successor to her masterpiece. She was convinced of the malice of the creatures; they were "incompetent, ignorant, flippant", and it was revolting to be judged by such. But a woman of her discernment must have known

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they were right, and, for the eternal enrichment of English fiction, she went back to personal and authentic experiences. For a little while she considered publishing *The Professor*, and wrote a preface for it, but then she bethought herself of the stock-pot into which she had shredded it and which had long been simmering. When she took off the lid, she found the broth ready, and she wrote *Villette*. It was founded on that searing experience of her own at Brussels when she fell in love with the unconscious M. Constantin Héger. It had robbed her of all internal peace for two years and now she externalized it. Once more, as in *Jane Eyre*, she was on sure ground, for she knew what she was writing about. Technically the book has serious faults. Lucy Snowe first falls in love with Dr. John, but when she discovers that he has nothing to give her, she transfers her heart, as if by post, to Paul Emmanuel, who has no significance till we are half-way through the book. And then (the triumph of it!) she comes into her own. Every word is alive; it burns with those fires of ecstasy and misery which she had herself been through, and from which now she came out unscathed. She laid her scene in its original setting at the *pensionnat* in the Rue d'Isabelle, and lived again that which had marred her life and made her art. A third masterpiece had issued from the Parsonage.

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Anthony Trollope

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THOSE novelists whose reputations, or names even, survive their own epoch by any considerable number of years, have usually been justly treated. And the recurring neglect lamented by the faithful is not usually, or at any rate solely, accounted for by the vagaries of fashion in fiction. It is at least as probable that their less worthy achievement, or that which was destined only to appeal to their contemporaries, has had its due effect, and that for the time being, at any rate, it has sunk with it all that might have authentic claims to posterity. Like those contemporaries, and the whole of their generation, they have fallen into the tracks of history, and any genuine revival, and certainly their ultimate survival, must depend on what they had in them of universality.

Trollope's novels date from the late 1840's to the early 1880's, and with any writer of the nineteenth century it is important to remember that the limited currency of education must have made his fellow-writers as well as his readers a small percentage of the population compared with present-day figures. It is true, of course, that education does not necessarily supply either the incentive or the ability to write, as true as that Dickens had practically no education, and that Trollope, though he attended first Winchester and then Harrow, hardly any more. But it is a fact that an extraordinarily large number of writers of today, sprung from lower-class parentage to early and

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impressive reputations, would, by pressure of circumstance and event, never have found themselves holding a pen in the Victorian era. As to readers, it was not until Trollope's last few years that any real move towards education for the masses and the consequent formation of a reading public was made. Trollope himself did not care for Dickens, and it may have been that, although he confesses to writing an abominable hand, to not being able to spell, and to an ignorance of the multiplication table when he entered the Post Office at the age of nineteen, he still, like others of superior birth in his time, thought that people of Dickens' low upbringing had no real justification for authorship. Incidentally he defended the highest Civil Service posts being given by patronage instead of by open competition, and evidently thought that he himself had acquired at Harrow something that was not to be measured either by figures or reading, or by industry in later life. In industry, in any case, he was to prove that he could have beaten any rival out of the field.

But some part at least of this attitude may have been reaction from the shame of poverty and unpopularity at school and to a feeling of inferiority which persisted afterwards and which needed all his strong common sense to overcome. That frustrated boyhood and youth of his, both at school and in the service of the Post Office, is important. Had those early years been happier it is probable that his determination to get on top as a writer, when once he had begun to find the way, would have been a good deal less complete. The man who tries to atone for something irretrievably lost in his early days by driving in one direction as an adult, feeling upon him the gaze of those happier ones he has left behind—happier because less at odds with life—is a man with real motive power. Then, too, Trollope's extraordinary physical vigour, and

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his mental and moral resilience, were invaluable to him. Even his regular habits as a Civil Servant were made to help. Remember, again, that he was the son of a mother who, burdened with a sick and penniless husband and two dying children, began writing at the age of fifty in the intervals of house-work, and in twenty-seven years produced one hundred and fourteen novels and other books. Trollope himself not only surveyed his writing country carefully, like a good official, but always finished the task on hand conscientiously, leaving no ends untied. He positively liked having his days filled with the demands of two professions, and found it difficult to persuade himself to leave the Service at the age of fifty-two. His decision to do so was made only when he had been disappointed over a better post, had acquired the editorship of the *St. Paul's Magazine*, and had already made enough money to give him an income equal to the official pension he would have obtained at the age of sixty. Could he possibly have covered all chances more completely? Though it may sound dull, it was not dull to him. He admits, for instance, when writing of two of his middle years, 1867 and 1868, that in the course of them he had visited the United States on Post Office business, established the Magazine and read an enormous number of manuscripts, had stood for Parliament at Beverley, hunted three times a week and written five novels. And he agrees that he had been busy. But he adds, "And how happy!"

With a man of that full energy, and of that sense and caution, it can be assumed that he would do his best for the readers of his novels, as he did for his clientele in the Postal service. Practically his only available readers were the small middle-class minority enjoying a prosperity more real and solid probably than any in England today. Few of them wanted more than the continuance of

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country houses, the hunting squirearchy, and a way of living that followed peaceably and unthinkingly the lead from cathedral and parsonage. It was not accidental that Trollope wrote chiefly of the Church and the squires, but do you think he would have written of them today, now that the moral ascendancy of the Church is dead with the War, and the squires are being taxed from the land? He had to be careful, perhaps, and not merely on his own account, since publishers and printers also have a hand in the production of books. Remember that a serial of his was refused in anguish by the editor of *Good Words* because its heroine went to a dance, and that he had a warm time defending himself from the attacks of one of his lifelong readers who was shocked at finding Lady Glencora in *Can You Forgive Her?* contemplating adultery. You may indeed come to the conclusion that Trollope knew pretty well what he was about, for you find him in his Autobiography summing up *Framley Parsonage* as an unusually courageous publisher's reader might have done:

The story was thoroughly English. There was a little fox hunting and a little tuft hunting, some Christian virtues and some Christian cant. There was no heroism and no villainy. There was much Church, but more love-making.

The novel, in any case, had then a very different and a narrower range than the novel of today, when there are attempts to extend it, to ally it with other forms, to vary its pace and its objectives, and to set it towards points of the compass hitherto unexplored. They are not few who believe that it is evolving towards a different form, and will within a decade or two leave its old shell behind it, to die the death into some new and glorious life. But there were no such considerations then. The novel would have been unthinkable if it had been more than a story, and the story entirely foreign if it had been much more than a

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record. Trollope owed his eminence to the fact that, despite limitations which he scarcely attempted to overcome, he was, beyond everything, a full and faithful recorder. He had, of course, more in him than that, or he would long ago have been forgotten. But a good recorder of his times has unusual survival value, and Trollope was persistent in covering his ground and filling his market. It must be said of him, in recalling the extensive and varied gallery of his characters, that he had a genuine impulse to create. But it is at least equally true that he fulfilled his impulse only within limits. As a creator, as a realistic creator even, within a chosen field he was at best, always and most curiously first the honest apprentice, then the accomplished workman. But most rarely anything more. He gave his people life, and he managed them with ease, but he scarcely ever dominated them. He liked the average people of a class, or say of two or three classes which could recognize one another, but not the average of humanity, which was far too low for him. But, in making his choice, could he escape the knowledge, and avoid its use in some at least of his fifty novels, that outside the country houses and rectories, scraping and dodging through on a minimum of mental and physical sustenance, was the humanity that toiled desperately hard, begged, borrowed or stole for its living, or was starved out of it on to the scrap-heap? Well, he did not altogether avoid it. And he acknowledged money-making and understood it to the degree to which it was useful to him, as he did the legal and other professions. But would you have gathered from him that England in his day was undergoing an industrial revolution which landed her in directions we are still vainly trying to understand and to change? He may not have been expected to foresee that; but so far from possessing

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the vision which might have discerned what in his age was the womb of the future, he omitted even the facts that could not be refined down to material for his chosen stories. No, he could not avoid the common people, he was blandly patient and conscientious over them, but in essence they were a nuisance to him. They were just the obverse side of what he knew so well, not a part of the same creation, and even when he gave them all the care he was sure they were worth he did not hide the fact.

Trollope confesses that he thought character the key to the novel and that plot must always be subsidiary. He backs this up in comments on his contemporaries which are almost entirely in terms of their characters, though with a few words added on style. Thackeray and George Eliot he praises. Dickens and Disraeli he condemns, and he hedges about Lytton and even about Charlotte Brontë. He could not withhold praise from "one small portion" of *Jane Eyre*. Indeed, he adjudged Charlotte "a marvellous woman", and went so far as to predict the survival of that book with *Esmond* and *Adam Bede* long after most contemporary novels should be forgotten. The Brontës must, however, have been a little disconcerting to Trollope. Daughters of the Church, their volcanic genius must have ravaged the peace of all the Church dignitaries of Bassetshire in an unforgettable, almost unforgivable fashion. They carried, indeed, enough explosive to have blown them all sky-high. They certainly did live on; but, on the other hand, a new generation which had Hardy and Henry James, Pater and Wilde, perhaps hardly needed the incentive supplied by Trollope's Autobiography to drop almost completely its already waning interest in him.

Trollope's characters were not only created out of close observation, but they lived and grew. It is true, of course, that his age had not much outward incident, and

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that its people were genuinely interested in one another, whereas nowadays they have barely time for a sharp discourtesy or two. I have heard it contended that Trollope was a satirist and a censor as well as a creator, but I do not agree. There were characters he disliked, and he got them fully and not unsightly. But he walked all round them in circles beforehand, and did not omit the walk from his pages. Though they were never bores or pedants he was long-winded with them, and it says a great deal for his sheer capacity that considering those over-presented characters, and often the thinness of his story, he is as readable as he is. His gift of natural dialogue was a great asset. There is too much of it, as there was too much of his people, but it was lively and true, and much of it remains a model that is not to be despised. It enabled him to deal very successfully with the crowded Barchester scene, and remembering Bishop Proudie, Doctor Grantly, Doctor Slope, Doctor Thorne, the Reverend Josiah Crawley and the Reverend Septimus Harding, one is not disposed to minimize his achievement. As for the women, Mrs Proudie may live as long as Becky Sharp, and there are others almost as memorable—Feemy Macdermott, Lily Dale, Mary Thorne, Lucy Robarts, Lady Lufton, and that (for Trollope) unusual person Martha Dunstable, so splendidly alive that she makes much of the success of *Doctor Thorne*. And his wicked ones, too, Sophie Gardeloup in *The Claverings*, Signora Neroni and Lizzie Eustace. But while it is probable that Trollope might have considerably increased the range and attractiveness of his characters but for the severely restrictive conventions of his age, I do not believe they would ever have been irresistible. He was one of his world, practical and public-minded like his men, of a dry and contained humour like his women, and with no overwhelming infusion of sentiment. But even

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in his minor novels his people are clearly differentiated and not merely assorted. Take a group of his women together, those for instance at Courcy Castle in *The Small House at Allington*, the ladies Dumbello, Alexandrina and de Courcy. Each is in character fully alive and squarely in the story. Take too the death scenes of Mrs Proudie and the Reverend Harding which round their lives. They are without a misplaced word on Trollope's part, perfect examples of the realism one cannot deny him, and which, where restraint is wanted, could hardly be bettered.

With his open disavowal of plot as the mainspring of the novel Trollope seldom used it with any great success. So much of mid-Victorian life was bound up with family progression or decay that in presenting it he used a continuing record of incident almost at will, feeling that his characters, well and truly drawn as they were, would in finding their own way find the story's too. It did not bother him that by these means he often formed a long novel from a parallel series of loosely allied tales. The space he allowed himself in telling them led to looseness, too, since you could catch him standing and looking hard and well at a situation or a problem, an incident even, merely as preparation for dealing with it fully. What were to him first-class crises would today succeed one another pretty rapidly and would hardly give a headache to one of his characters grown modern. The mechanics of his construction were of course simple, and it was generally straightforward and reasonable and well worked out. He asked his reader with modest triumph, "Can you take exception to it?" But when it comes to results, the easiest grace of movement will not help a mile runner who adopts a Marathon pace. Nowadays, of course, the poorest fiction avoids the long and simple exposition of what should be implicit. And the fact that in the Barset-

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shire cycle Trollope tried out and survived in a manner really admirable the perils of the intricate interrelations of a whole set of families over a complete generation, cannot blind us to the liberties he allowed himself in that generous turning-space of his. Take as an example these remarks to his readers in *The Warden*, the novel which put him on the map and which made him a name he was careful to keep, and remember that this was a method he did not need to shed: "And now let us observe the well-furnished breakfast-table at Plumstead Episcopi", following which we observe it all only too completely: "Dear ladies, you are right as to your appreciation of the circumstances, but . . ."; "And here we must take leave of Archdeacon Grantly. We fear that he is represented in these pages as being worse than he is", a surprising statement that is backed by a great deal of explanation intended to put the Archdeacon right. His method, which with some of his characters he would no doubt claim to be a sure one, seems to be to see that they are strictly in key. When, again in *The Warden*, Henry Charles and Samuel, Archdeacon Grantly's sons, are presented on the occasion of Mr Bold's visit, each by speech or action illustrates the characteristics which had been specifically outlined as his earlier in the book.

One must concede as further qualities invention and narrative strength, which are both used to the full in sustaining Trollope's extraordinarily acute powers of perception. And there is ingenuity where wanted as well as invention, and a very pleasant humour. Of real delicacy, wit, fancy, pathos, to say nothing of passion, Trollope possessed amazingly little. Considering the sum of his achievement, his equipment, when all is examined, is really not impressive, and having regard to his restriction in range he tried it out far too often. Here you have a writer

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who himself says, "To have the sweet, and leave the bitter untasted, that has been my study. The preachers tell us that this is impossible. It seems to me that hitherto I have succeeded fairly well." It would indeed never have seemed to him that there may be either success which means everything or failure which cannot be raised from the pit. The monotony which he did not avoid, but which he was so extraordinarily skilful, even courageous, in dissembling, you may put down if you will to the pressure of Victorian moral traditions. But if you do, think of the Brontës once more, and think of Dickens too. Admitting that Trollope stands as one of the surviving representatives of a period, can we say that he really got much beyond the minor function of recording it? Had he the genius to stand above his age, to survey it like a god, to enshrine it in history, to project it into Time, either seen or apprehended? He had what Henry James acknowledged to be a "complete appreciation of the usual", but did he know whether, or if so how, it formed part of the universal? And where was a touch of the poetry, the mysticism, or even that deepest comprehension that might have raised his achievement from a faithful transcription of middle-class Victorian England into the representation of an epoch?

The answer is that Trollope had neither the power nor the wish to stand so clearly outside and above what he saw, and the fact that he was a child of his age is no complete reply to this. Take as a good specimen of the novel about his times that is not written from the inside Israel Zangwill's *Jimmy the Carrier*, which exhibits them in a sane and sweet temper, at a correct pace, and which is atmospherically perfect. Zangwill had the advantages and disadvantages of looking back sixty or seventy years. The disadvantages are not apparent in the book, for the

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texture is so wonderfully right. Again, Jinny was a daughter of the people, sweet and sound, her mere presence a pleasure though she represented life that was down to the poverty line. Though she was of Trollope's generation, I do not think he would have fully understood her, or that she would have been any more complete in his hands than the people of her class he has given us. And as a reason why the creation of lower-class characters was not his forte, to say the least of it, take this casual comment of his on the appointment, by the newly started *Pall Mall Gazette*, of a reporter to visit and describe the casual wards in London:

A person had to be selected who would undergo the misery of a night among the usual occupants of a casual ward in a London poor-house, and who should at the same time be able to record what he felt and saw. The choice fell upon Mr Greenwood's brother, who certainly possessed the courage and the powers of endurance.

Trollope also speaks of him as having "encountered all the horrors of that night". And in another place he says:

We do not understand the operations of Almighty wisdom, and are therefore unable to tell the causes of the terrible inequalities we see. . . .

No, Trollope had not the vision to survey his age or the genius to express its place in the cycle of the years. His faithful representation of a certain type of its life did sometimes rise to interpretation, and that is why he lives. But though he extended his range wherever he could this was mainly a matter of breadth, he rarely went, indeed he could not go, deeper. Of the dozen novels which stand the best chance of any further survival the Barsetshire six stand together: *The Warden*, *Barchester Towers*, *Doctor Thorne*, *Framley Parsonage*, *The Small House at Allington* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. Then there are, let us say, *Orley Farm*, *The Claverings*, *Phineas Finn*,

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Can You Forgive Her? Ralph the Heir and He Knew He Was Right. Yet though they do, without a doubt, represent an achievement which cannot be ignored, one may find it strangely diminishing when seeking to place it on the height one feels should justify its survival, and raising questions as to why and wherefore that are more than difficult to answer.

It has been suggested that because Trollope was honest according to his lights and had the perception and the courage to present certain oppressors of the people as it might be "in their famous act of oppressing", he might with a turn of the wheel, or perhaps a decade or so later, have added to himself the rôle of reformer. There is no real proof of it. It is true that he recognized the vulgarity and the pride of purse and house of his time. But it is also clear that he liked comfort and a good income—he averaged £4500 a year for twelve years—and that he preferred the society of distinguished to that of unknown people. And he knew too that those he wrote about would be better pleased at seeing their neighbours mildly castigated than resentful at any implied condemnation of themselves.

Nevertheless, Trollope was independent enough at least to experiment in unpopular directions, and experiment too in a fashion which left no doubt as to an underlying integrity and disinterestedness. I do not say that any general classification of his books, or the mere fact that apart from the Barchester cycle and the novels of social life there were political and historical and romantic novels, and a few later ones whose interest was really psychological, proves it to any great degree. For they were all, with two exceptions, alike in kind. It is the two exceptions which, considering his tremendous output, are interesting in this connexion. With Trollope you are likely to begin to look for exceptions. Sheer doggedness, and that "poor

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boy" complex leading him on to achievement, these factors, I do not think it is ungenerous to say, account largely for his long tale of books. The first real proof of basic independence is that he set his courage, his short-sighted courage if you will, as he did in the hunting field, at an almost impossible fence in publishing anonymously *Nina Balatka* and *Linda Tressel*. He wanted to see if they would make a mark without his name, but they did not, and Blackwood, his publisher, would not risk a third. And the second departure from the successful norm was that, whether he willed it or not, the psychologist first, then the satirist in him, grew with the years. *Phineas Redux* and *The Prime Minister*, which were published in 1876, six years before his death, show in particular, and for all their faults, this shifting from a plain sociological point of attack. And Hugh Walpole has rightly drawn attention to Trollope's almost complete change to a satirical front in *The Way We Live Now*. It showed the possibilities of a left centre stand which, had he taken it earlier, might have put him in a far more secure position as an interpreter of his times. Perhaps a certain weariness of age, and the increasing expression of honesty that sometimes overtakes the man who has in any case done very well out of his profession and sends him an impulsive step further—into the confessional box—may in part have accounted for it. But he had a real sting in his tail, like the man of character that he was, in that frank Autobiography which so shocked the faithful that they no longer bought his books, its pride and its humility both being of the kind they had never suspected from his novels. Trollope could afford to laugh about that in advance, seeing that he would not publish it during his life. His publisher doubtless did not laugh so heartily, nor perhaps the inheritor of his royalties.

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Trollope and those who had grown old with him gave way to a generation that faced its times with a very different realism, or rather, perhaps, a realism expressed from more than one observation point that had not existed in the mid-Victorian plains. And those successors of his, while necessarily they had affinities with his outlook that we cannot have today, reacted from mid-Victorian solidity in a way that may have been more fundamentally inimical than our own mere boredom with it. It does not perhaps mean that either they or we have learned anything essential that was a closed book to Trollope's generation. But we do seem to endeavour to avoid that slow and almost self-conscious material folly, folly with a smirk, that they not only possessed, but reckoned a matter for spiritual pride. What they really had of wisdom, social, moral, industrial, they practised in humility, but that we dislike even more. We are ourselves, no doubt, the quick sort of fools they would recognize at once as being bound for disaster, and it is indeed true that we can never from day to day feel sure of avoiding it on the morrow. We do not deserve, and we could not accept, Trollope as his own times deserved and accepted him, but we have a different range of sins, and novelists who express them in new ways that we accept without a pang. And, Heavens! how many of them!

BONAMY DOBRÉE

George Meredith

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*By Bonamy Dobrée*¹

BROWNING, Carlyle, Meredith—the names stand for greatness; but they also stand as monuments of difficulty, as though they wilfully imposed on the reader an almost impossible gymnastic before he can grasp at their meaning. What is the reason for this vice? we ask, which made the first contort his poetry, and the last their prose (for Meredith's poetry is as lucid as poetry need be); and with these last we sometimes feel that the word "German" is explanation enough. There are other, and better, explanations, for the complexity of all of them. Take Meredith (for we can now leave the other two): what was it that made him write so as to provoke grumbles from such diverse people as Henley, with his "Mr Meredith is one of the worst and least attractive of great writers, as well as one of the best and most fascinating"; and Flecker, who said of *Beauchamp's Career* that he wished he could have "the re-writing of it in decent English"? And we ourselves may ask, for instance, why did he need to say, in *Diana of the Crossways*, "the merit of warmth appertained to the beverage", when he wanted to say that the tea was hot?

But suppose, after all, that this girding and grousing is not only beside the point, but due to a definite misunder-

¹ Mr Dobrée's essay has been published in *The National Review*, and is printed here with the Editor's permission.

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standing of what Meredith was trying to do—for we must attack this question of style before we can approach other issues—and that the difficulty is just as essential as the other qualities which are everywhere hailed as brilliant virtues? It may be that we need not with Henley impute the difficulties to wantonness, recklessness, splendid impertinence, while conceding that he can write English “as ripe and sound and unaffected as heart could wish”. The heart, no doubt, desires ease; but Meredith’s appeal is always at least as much to the intellect as to the more emotional organ, and it is there that we must look for the explanation, and it is there that we can justify the “vice”. “I read in a critical review . . . the other day, that I was ‘a harlequin and performer of antics’. I am accustomed to that kind of writing,” Meredith told G. P. Baker in a letter that is of first-class interest when considering his manner, which he there unrepentantly comments on. And if we look at his general technique, we notice that the complications occur, not in the great scenes, where his people are shown “in the fullest of their blood and brain under stress of a fiery situation”, but in the doldrums between, or rather what would be such in most other writers, but which he is determined shall not be unexciting. He is intent to keep the reader’s mind lively all the while; the brain is to act alertly on every piece of material that is brought to the notice of the senses: there is to be no idling, no falling into the trough of merely sensual appreciation; the reader must work all the time. Therefore, the food must offer resistance to the teeth. “Concerning style, thought is tough, and dealing with thought produces toughness.” And again (still the letter to Baker), “here and there . . . you will find a ‘pitch’ considerably above our common human; and purposely, for only in such a manner could so much be shown. Those high

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notes and condensings are abandoned when the strong human call is heard."

And how can the mind be kept in full motion better than by images, or by metaphor, that sure sign of originality? Take even so simple a matter as a newspaper article; how dead the consideration would become in most hands other than Meredith's! Let us look at the approach to Mr Timothy Turbot's leader in *Beauchamp*:

But for an occasional drop and bump of the sailing gas-bag upon catchwords of enthusiasm, which are the rhetoric of the merely windy, and a collapse on a poetic line, which too often signalises the rhetorician's emptiness of his wind, the article was eminent for flight, sweep, and dash, and sailed along far more grandly than ordinary provincial organs for the promoting or seconding of public opinion, that are as little to be compared with the mighty metropolitan as are the fife and bugle boys practising on their instruments round melancholy outskirts of garrison towns with the regimental marching full band under the presidency of its drum major. . . . Oratory will not work against the stream, or on languid tides.

It is full of ideas, of criticism, of vivid imagery; every sentence, every phrase of every sentence, stimulates thought and imagination. Of course, it demands energy on the reader's part, active collaboration: therefore, there are many people who "cannot read Meredith". The lazy mind, as Diana remarked, hates metaphor. But then you do not read Meredith for relaxation, as a soporific, for after-dinner ease, and he did not intend that you should: in fact, he was determined that you should not: a novel is a serious business, for either art is the most important thing in life, or it is a toy to be broken in the nursery. He believed that it was important.

But the "pitch" of which Meredith wrote to Baker is not merely one of concentration of style; he was concerned with a certain "pitch" of life at which he was always aiming, which he was constantly affirming. (One

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wonders how many scores of times the word "civilization" occurs in his novels, always with the implication of a clear apprehension of values.) He is for ever, consciously, as though it were the proper part of the thinking beast, turning away from realism, and turning away from it as the harder task. "Humanity" for him meant dwelling in a superior ether. "I strive by study of humanity to represent it: not its morbid action", he wrote to Admiral (then Captain) Maxse: "I have a tendency to do that, which I repress: for in delineating it there is no gain. . . . Much of my strength lies in painting morbid emotion and exceptional positions; but my conscience will not let me so waste my time." Thus his people are always animated by an intense, healthy vitality; there is insistence on their superb physical energy—in Clara Middleton, in Cecilia Halkett, in Diana, in Lucy Desborough: one notices it particularly in the women: in the men it is taken for granted, consciously, of course, in the case of Sir Willoughby Patterne. "Fellows who contract illnesses, are usually guilty (I don't say always) of idleness", he told his son. The attitude is a revolt against realism, a bold affirmation; his people, as much as his brilliant metaphor, sweep us up into the skies: we lead a fuller, richer, more significant life with them. Moreover, the opposite of realism is not necessarily romanticism; it is idealism; and this, as much as romanticism, may provide its pitfalls. We see the falsity it may possibly lead to in the fantastic unreality, the cardboard glory, of *The Tragic Comedians*, where, though the book is a half-biography of Lassalle, we never come to grips with flesh and blood. But, as Meredith wrote to Mr Jessop, "Between realism and idealism, there is no natural conflict. This completes that. Realism is the basis of good composition: it implies study, observation, artistic power, and (in those who can do

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more) humility." But no "cobwebs in a putrid corner": he has still more unpleasant terms than that for realism.

That is why *Beauchamp's Career* is so solidly grounded a piece of imaginative fiction: in it Meredith was treating of scenes he had been engaged in—an election at Southampton; and of a hero whom he knew intimately, Admiral Maxse. Frederick Maxse, like Beauchamp, had displayed great bravery in the Crimea; like Beauchamp, he contested an election as a radical. But, of course, it was more than mere portraiture, or the telling of a story, that Meredith was after:

It is philosophical-political [he wrote to Moncure Conway], with no powerful stream of adventure: an attempt to show the forces round a young man of the present day, in England, who would move them, and finds them unutterably solid, though it is seen in the end that he does not altogether fail, has not lived in vain. Of course this is done in the concrete. A certain drama of self-conquest is gone through, for the hero is not perfect.

At the same time, he wanted to show "the mild spirit of a prosperous middle-class". But he never allowed himself to be governed by a theme; he always seized the persons in their actuality; they were never puppets for him to preach a sermon by.

There is a paragraph in *Beauchamp's Career* which lets us into the secret of why his people breathe more of the spirit than those of any novelist writing at the present day, or, perhaps, who has ever written in England. Meredith may have his prickles, yet the moment we turn to him from the most belauded works of today, however solidly based, hailed as immortal pictures of an epoch, what a relief we experience! Here we are among people who matter; we are anxious about them because their problems are our problems; their experience, their conclusions, mean something. The danger of imaginative literature is

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that it may become mere sensationalism, stop short at an appeal to the emotions. To what end? we ask, fatigued and worried by the loss of energy expended in futile emotion that can lead us nowhere. Such novels are popular: they are eagerly lapped up by those who have no real emotions of their own, the great mass of people of whom Shelley wrote: "Their domestic affections are weak: and they have no others". Meredith steadfastly refused to offer the popular lure. "My aim, and I trust it will be yours", he admonished his son, "is never to take counsel of my sensations, but of my intelligence. I let the former have free play, but deny them the right to bring me to a decision." Thus what most wrung the heart of Lady Dunstane when she saw Diana at her lowest ebb, was that she seemed to have "sunk her intelligence in her sensations". But then, if imaginative literature rejects sensationalism, there is the other extreme, the flat reproduction of everyday, the slice of life cut from the dry bread, with an austere abstention from butter. Again we ask, "To what end?" Where is the middle way, neither sloppy nor arid, in which we can breathe freely without feeling ourselves rapt above our common footing? Meredith treads it: and here is the paragraph from *Beauchamp's Career*:

We will make no mystery about it. I would I could. Those happy tales of mystery are as much my envy as the popular narratives of the deeds of bread and cheese people, for they both create a tide-way in the attentive mind; the mysterious pricking our credulous flesh to creep, the familiar urging our obese imagination to constitutional exercise. And oh, the refreshment there is in dealing with characters either contemptibly beneath us or supernaturally above! My way is like a Rhone Island in the summer drought, stony, unattractive and difficult, between the two forceful streams of the unreal and the overreal, which delight mankind—honour to the conjurers! My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual, yet uncommon. It is the clockwork of the brain that they are directed to

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set in motion, and—poor troop of actors to vacant benches!—the conscience residing in thoughtfulness which they would appeal to; and if you are there impervious to them, we are lost: back I go to my wilderness, where, as you perceive, I have contracted the habit of listening to my own voice more than is good.

Not realism, then, not romance, but idealism; the constant effort to think, to create values, to rise above the sensations of body or feeling—that was the object. “My people are actual; yet uncommon.” Yes, indeed: “The subtlety of the motives of speech of Meredith’s characters makes one feel quite a coarse common fellow”, Flecker confessed: and perhaps only Sir Willoughby Patterne would deny it, or be contemptuous of it. Indeed, the rapidity of thought of these people makes them leap over many of the intermediate steps trodden by us grosser mortals; their minds seem to fly off at a tangent so swiftly, that we miss the point of departure from the comfortably obvious circle: we pant breathless after them: and it is worth the effort.

But once more we ask, “To what end?” Where is the “gain” in his own word, of being on the Rhone Island in a summer drought? And here we come to the central forge of his work, the impulse which made him write, the “something to say” which urged him to expression. For we know he did not write merely to amuse people, to let them escape from their own lives, to live vicariously in the minds and feelings of other people. That is not to say he was didactic; it is impossible to conceive him writing a Fabian novel; he had no particular axe to grind: but it does imply that, like all great artists, he had some definite attitude towards life which he wished to impart; he did not feel easy until he had imparted it. And here we may borrow freely from the brilliant analysis of M. Ramon Fernandez.¹ The spring, he discovers, was primarily a

¹ *Messages*, by Ramon Fernandez. N.R.F., 1926.

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superb optimism, a belief in humanity, a faith that it could rise above its animal limitations, that dominated his mind. There was no lazy acceptance of the somewhat crude Darwinism of his day, a pessimistic acceptance which may be compared with the modern welcome accorded to popular Freudianism. To live is a perpetual process of affirmation, and also, essentially, to be placed, to be judged: and the judgement of fact must always be accompanied by a judgement of values. This implies intense intellectual activity during the whole of life, a striving after lucidity, and a desire for ideal circumstances in which the intuition can have full play. "Le drame des personnages de Meredith, c'est toujours et essentiellement le drame d'une sensibilité exigeante"; there are no lumps of clay who will enjoy life as it is given them, unless, like Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer in *The Egoist*, they are there as material for scorn. They are concerned with themselves, no doubt; but they cannot live without thinking, so that thought may make them act, to the end that they may move freely in the world they cannot accept, and can hardly hope to change. To be themselves, in fact, they *must* move freely in this world: that is why Meredith chooses aristocrats to portray: Beauchamp is an obvious instance. Feeling, thought, intuition, value, these things, therefore, Meredith seems able to create instantaneously and simultaneously in his people, as no other writer, at least in English, has ever done. They are not presented primarily as physical portraits: "such literary craft is of the nursery". Diana declared, "the art of the pen is to rouse the inward vision". Nor are they so put together that their emotions can be separated from the rest of them, for dissection. That is why, though they are in continual vibration, they seem so real; they are "more real than reality"; they have significance, a general

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significance. If they do not help us to see life clearly and see it whole, if we are impervious to them in the conscience residing in thoughtfulness, then indeed we are lost, and for us, at least, Meredith had better have stayed in his wilderness.

But no man is altogether free from certain brute facts of his age which irritate his consciousness, sometimes to his detriment, sometimes as a stimulus. And with Meredith, one issue seems to have acted as a stimulus—the position of women, witness his letter to H. W. Strong:

Since I have begun to reflect, I have been oppressed by the injustice done to women, the restraint put upon their natural aptitudes and their faculties, generally much to the degradation of the race. I have not studied them more closely than I have men, but with more affection, a deeper interest in their enfranchisement and development, being assured that women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress. They will so educate their daughters, that these will not be instructed at the start to think themselves naturally inferior to men, because less muscular, and need not have recourse to particular arts, feline chiefly, to make their way in the world. I have no special choice among the women of my books. Perhaps I gave more colour to *Diana of the Crossways* and Clara Middleton of *The Egoist*, and this on account of their position.

He might have added Cecilia Halkett, for all three are delightful emanations; they think as well as feel. Without their equality with men, no progress can be made: that is the important statement, for without it there can be no superior civilization, no society, "the best thing we have", and no comedy, that sweet perfume which is the property of civilization alone. But the laughter of that comedy must be spiritual laughter, illuminating laughter, as he insisted in *The Idea of Comedy*.

Which brings us to *The Egoist*, the most perfect comedy in the language—and we do not forget *Volpone* or *The Way of the World*, nor Fielding, nor Jane Austen. The

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claim of comedy that it heals us of our vices is a doubtful one; it is more often prig-writing, which sharpens us to note the vices of our neighbours, to our great content. But with *The Egoist* this is not so; no one—except perhaps the Willoughby Patternes of the world—can read it without wriggling now and again: it is a salutary discipline, but one from which we rise healthier and heartier. As art it is consummate, not only in its perfect dramatic construction, its closeness, its complete rounding-off and masterly catastrophe, but in the exquisite points it makes again and again. It probes as deep as psychologists' borings can probe, and all the time it is at the topmost height of the sublimely ridiculous. Take, for instance, Sir Willoughby talking of the ever-delightful Vernon Whitford:

"I want him here; and, supposing he goes, he offends me; he loses a friend; and it will not be the first time that a friend has tried me too far; but if he offends me, he is extinct."

"Is what?" cried Clara with a look of fright.

"He becomes to me at once as if he had never been. He is extinct."

"In spite of your affection?"

"Because of it, I might say. Our nature is mysterious, and mine as much so as any. Whatever my regrets, he goes out. This is not the language I talk to the world. I do the man no harm; I am not to be named unchristian. But! . . ."

And the fun of it! the delicious Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson, with her incomparable definitions; old Dr. Middleton with his profound disquisition on port; the farce of the scenes, sometimes, which becomes a romp, as when, at the climax, "The door opened: Lady Busshe and Lady Culmer were announced"; the antiphonal intoning of the Patterne aunts: it is much of it as uproarious as the rollicking fun of that neglected little gem, *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper*. And everywhere, the lightning-flashes of wit, never here excessive; sometimes

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deftly directed to reveal one more bone in the shoddy skeleton of the egoist, sometimes to jerk us into thought. Not an easy book to read, no! Meredith never insults the intelligence even of the adept; but how well worth any struggle! so well worth it that the struggle itself imparts a glow of delight. What a man to have pondered such a miracle! we say, when we consider what a work of literary art is, how it is dug out of the artist himself, out of something in himself which he has elaborated and ruthlessly analysed, with complete disinterestedness. The greatest artist is he who can most thoroughly do this, provided, of course, that there is something in him to dig out.

Richard Feverel is not a book for your true Meredithian to hold up in triumph. It is Meredith's most popular book, perhaps, but that is exactly what is against it; for in it Meredith was doing precisely what he afterwards abjured, appealing to the emotions, "fiddling harmonics on the sensual strings". True, there is the lyricism of the early Richard-Lucy scenes:

The song seraphically free
From taint of personality,

and the somewhat too dithyrambic description of countryside; but we ask for something different in a Meredith novel. Yet the book is of the greatest interest as a document; it shows that Meredith, capable of two distinct sorts of novel, deliberately chose the harder, although the sort he abandoned he could have done amazingly well, and with far greater general applause than he ever got. But the harder sort better satisfied his exacting intellect. And in *Richard Feverel*, in the treatment of the System, in Sir Austin, in Adrian Harley, the shadow of Sir Willoughby looms already, as Vernon Whitford lies in germ

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in Austin Wentworth, and Clara Middleton is adumbrated in Lady Blandish.

It cannot be denied that Meredith did sometimes allow his pen, his astounding fertility of verbal invention, to run away with him. He trimmed his exuberance (notably in the later editions of *Richard Feverel* and *Evan Harrington*) and we could sometimes wish that he had docked his phrases. Yet if you love words for their own sake—and some of us are addicted to that amiable vice—you will not grudge him his “splendid impertinence”. Again, he is sometimes improbable in details: you cannot, as Diana did, live in poverty, work hard at a book, and at the same time appear sparkling at society dinners every night; the struggles Clara had to go through to be released by Sir Willoughby strike us as being more than a shade eighteenth-century. But these things can be blown away like dandelion-down from the sleeve; they do not count, we are prepared to swallow them for the sake of the other thing we get. And this is something of the rarest quality, something which we cannot get from life, though we would if we could—a sense of power, of optimism, of clarity. He makes us move more freely in this bewildering world, gives us a firmer hold of ourselves, and we march the more gaily for the sound of his civilizing laughter.

CATHERINE CARSWELL

Samuel Butler

SAMUEL BUTLER

By Catherine Carswell

MOST novelists have been eager readers of novels. They have been influenced by the work of their predecessors and interested by that of their contemporaries. Hence, although the best of them became themselves inaugurators, and often became so by breaking away from their teachers, we can trace their line of descent in the development of fiction up to their own time.

To this, as to so many other rules, Samuel Butler is an exception. Born into the full tide of that romantic and entertaining fiction to which the *Waverley* Novels had given rise, he saw the novel as anything but a respectable vehicle of living thought; and living thought of the kind that affects a man's actions was all that interested him. When he read novels, which it would seem he did no more than he could help as an ordinarily cultured member of the public, he was usually either hostile, bored or mildly amused. The one novel, if novel it may be called, that elicited his deep admiration, however violently he rejected its premises, was *Pilgrim's Progress*. He found even Fielding intolerably prolix, although he admitted that *Tom Jones* was a masterpiece. Dickens and Thackeray he loathed, particularly Dickens, and if he was a cordial reader of Disraeli this may be ascribed to his own strong Tory principles, his intense dislike of Mr Gladstone, and, perhaps, a natural delight in such an unthwarted, flamboyant and dressy figure as the author of *Coningsby* and

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Endymion presented to the world. Of all English novels he most detested those of the *Robert Elsmere* type, which set up to be philosophical or religious, and he does not seem to have studied the novels of Voltaire or Rousseau. Butler was not catholic in his tastes, and, as he did not believe in reading books of which the immediate flavour did not please him, he was not a widely read man. As for our modern efforts it is doubtful if he would have persevered beyond the first few pages of the best of them; and the doubt would apply most strongly to those which have derived from him. M. Abel Chevalley, writing in 1921 upon the English novel of our time, has remarked that, following upon *The Way of All Flesh*, there is scarcely a self-respecting novel in which the father is not execrated. Other critics have said, with some justice, that in this book we have the "first expression in fiction of the revolt of the life-force against ready-made morality", and that its author "became a great force for personal rebellion first of all through fiction and his influence on fiction".

Yet could we invent a worse purgatory for Samuel Butler than one in which he would be compelled to read, without skipping, the interminable succession of autobiographical novels by young English writers, gifted and not so gifted, who have felt encouraged by his example to retrace for us their progress from the cradle to maturity over the hurdles and across the drains of paternal fixations, Oedipus complexes, and amatory blunders of the kind to which he was the first to draw attention as material for fiction? "If I die prematurely", he noted, "at any rate I shall be saved from being bored by my own success."

He might have added that he would have been saved from being shocked by it. As it is on the whole easier to bore than to refrain from being bored, so it is easier to shock than to be secure from receiving shocks. In his

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own day Butler was forced to accept the position of "a literary pariah". (It is his own expression.) Even in our day his editor, Mr Festing Jones, has felt obliged to withhold many of his Notes as being "of a kind that must wait if they are ever to be published", and during Butler's lifetime it was manifestly inadvisable to make public the repositories which contained the fresh fruit of his thinking and his experience. We have only to read his observations now to see how offensive they were calculated to be to the leaders of Victorian science and philosophy from their distrust of the intellect, and how revolting to the more literary from their rude treatment of human sanctities, their uncompromisingly sensual declarations and the determined manner in which the writer ran counter to accepted teaching. Here are some of them:

Logic has no place save with that which can be defined in words. It has nothing to do, therefore, with those deeper questions that have got beyond words and consciousness.

The question whether such and such a course of conduct does or does not do physical harm is the safest test by which to try the question whether it is moral or no. If it does no harm to the body we ought to be very chary of calling it immoral, while if it tends towards physical excellence there should be no hesitation in calling it moral.

The true laws of God are our own well-being.

The truest virtue has ever inclined towards excess rather than asceticism.

Intellectual over-indulgence is the most gratuitous and disgraceful form which excess can take, nor is there any the consequences of which are more disastrous.

A master in any art should be first man, then poet, then craftsman.

It is good for a man that he should not be thwarted—that he should have his own way as far, and with as little difficulty, as possible.

A man should avoid converse with things that have been stunted or starved. . . .

All our limbs and sensual organs, in fact our whole body and life, are but an accretion round and fostering of the spermatozoa. They

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are the real "He". A man's eyes, ears, tongue, nose, legs and arms are but so many organs and tools that minister to the protection, education, increased intelligence and multiplication of the spermatozoa; so that our whole life is in reality a series of complex efforts in respect of them, conscious or unconscious according to their commonness. They are the central fact in our existence, the point towards which all effort is directed.

We may say what we will, but Life is, *au fond*, sensual.

In a scientific manual some of them might have passed. But as a serious rule of conduct? From a clergyman's son who claimed that he was himself a Christian? From one who held firm views concerning faith and an "Unseen World", and was prepared, if need be, to "put all else on one side and, shrinking from no sacrifice . . . face shame and torture here rather than abandon the hope of the prize of his high calling"? Hardly. Even as the utterances of a jester, they could elicit no other response than the one consecrated by Queen Victoria, "We are not amused".

If the sayings here selected are notably from among those in making which Butler "dropped his mask"—to use a phrase that his friend Miss Savage used concerning him—they are not therefore the less indicative of his convictions. And, although the *Note-Books* were accordingly unpublishable, we must remind ourselves that their significance inevitably overflowed into Butler's published works and flavoured his lightest irony in a way that made readers nervous even when they did not understand.

One reader, whom we must regard as personally sympathetic to Butler seeing that he was shown part of the MS. of *The Way of All Flesh*, considered that the author had taken "all the tenderest feelings of our Nature and, having spread them carefully over the floor, stamped on them till he had reduced them to an indistinguishable mass of filth and then handed them round for inspection".

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When the book was published, after Butler's death, many readers, including a Canon, found it to be "very painful reading"—and we know what that is intended to mean—while at least one lady felt obliged to burn her copy. It needed such a poet as W. B. Yeats to explain what Butler had been fighting for, namely, that "people should be on good terms with their senses and appetites and everything else that goes into our making as men". Among English critics Richard Garnett was mild and gentlemanlike in his expression of a widespread feeling when Christina Pontifex burst upon the novel-reading world. "Our mothers, at least," he opined, "should be safe from attack."

Butler, well used to such comments, would doubtless have contented himself with the dry rejoinder that he did not himself take that view. But one wonders what his own comment would be were he confronted by certain of our later writers whose position could show much that is analogous to his. He might have found a wittier way of expressing disapproval than Richard Garnett did when surveying the unfilial exposure of Christina. But in considering, for example, the attempt of a D. H. Lawrence to investigate the last human relationship to lie under the taboo of the novel-reading public, would he have said of it, as Maurice Hewlett did of *The Way of All Flesh*, "it isn't done", with the shrug which implies "I could do it easily enough if I were so unmanly as to wish to try"? Possibly he would. For, although Butler and Lawrence held very similar notions concerning both "the Kingdom of Heaven"—(Butler's choice of a phrase)—which was upon earth although unseen, and of their debt towards life in trying to forward that kingdom at whatever cost to themselves, their methods were different and liable to different misconstructions.

We may, however, be allowed to give ourselves and

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Butler the benefit of our doubt. After all he was "aware that the sexual question is of more practical importance than any . . . can be." "But", as he added, "I have got to take the world as I find it and must not make myself impossible. At present I have the religious world bitterly hostile; the scientific and literary world are even more hostile than the religious: if to this hostility I am to add that of the respectable world, I may as well shut up shop at once for all the use I shall be to myself or anyone else."

What is quite certain is that he would have been amazed at the assurance with which almost any writer of today could demonstrate that, with all his courage, the author of *The Way of All Flesh* remained, even after the liberating death of his father, a terrified creature, disingenuous in his shirking of sexual responsibility, indulging his appetites only with the proviso that he should never commit himself, flying from the reality of love and living beauty, and finding his refuge in the dream of an impossibly attractive, young and intelligent princess—the "authoress of the *Odyssey*". The inventor of the terms "unconscious humour" and "unconscious memory" included and foresaw much, but he did not foresee this.

Equally we may question any prescience in Butler that his own novel, about which he was "more doubtful than about any book I have ever done", would be justly regarded as a fountain-head of what came after him. It is one of the ironies of immortality that Ernest Pontifex should have begotten a long and various family, all bearing some of his features on faces that too often lack any noticeable sign of his intelligence.

Absorbed in formulating a religious philosophy, Butler gathered his material with superb eclecticism from almost every source except that of the novel. He got it from

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scientific and theological works, from pictures and music, from poetry, from the Bible—which he had diligently searched so that he knew it backwards and forwards and upside-down, particularly upside-down—and from his own very considerable experience in three countries—England, Italy and New Zealand. We cannot be sufficiently grateful to Canon Butler that his son was enabled to make two escapes from the land of his birth. Samuel never ceased to be something of a prig, but at least he discovered that “priggishness is the sin that doth most easily beset the middle-class and so-called educated Englishman”, himself included. A born faddist, and the possessor of that kind of worshipping heart which can be grossly deceived, he had also an eye for genuine liveliness wherever seen. In his travels he developed a fine response to many sorts of men, and he was quick to detect the man and the meaning behind any work of art. But he remained impatient of the padding or the dilution which was then, and perhaps is still, necessary for the making of a novel. He preferred his material to be either neat (*i.e.* scientifically or religiously expressed) or in the rough, and did not willingly suffer another mind to perform combining or digestive processes for him. In a word he objected to the fictions in fiction.

His own attempt at novel-writing—for *Erewhon* can hardly be considered as a novel proper—contained, as Butler said, “records of things I saw happening rather than imaginary incidents”. That was putting it mildly. Ernest Pontifex is the young Samuel in so painstaking a degree that we find the mature Samuel (as embodied in Mr Overton, Ernest’s good angel) occasionally wearying of his priggish protégé. It is in the very faithfulness with which he abode by his model that he achieves a detachment unparalleled by other “semi-autobiographical”

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novelists. That Butler persevered in his undertaking in the face of this worst of all wearinesses, the weariness of oneself, and that he permitted himself also to quote in its entirety one of his mother's letters in circumstances which put her on record as a fraud for all time, are the strongest proofs that he had come to regard what he was engaged upon as no ordinary effort of fiction. To neither of these things would he have consented had his aim been chiefly to amuse.

"I cannot settle down", he wrote to Miss Savage when she had urged him to write a novel, "to trying to amuse people when there is work wants doing which I believe I am just the man to do." Accordingly he then set himself to write *The Fair Haven*, a work of religious import and ironic cast, which, when it appeared, was more widely misinterpreted than read. The idea, however—not Miss Savage's but his own—of trying to record his most personal experience in an autobiographical narrative which should spare nobody—took shape, and must have persisted (after a preliminary experiment in technique which he appended as an introduction to *Fair Haven*), because he found that after all this was work that wanted doing and that perhaps he was the man to do it. There is, in fact, no other English novel which amuses on so many planes. But with few exceptions, notably the book on Shakespeare's sonnets, none of Butler's works fail to amuse. The point is that one cannot read a couple of pages anywhere in the story of the Pontifexes without seeing that the story is primarily a device by which to communicate the distillations of Butler's thought. If we know it we know not only him but the essentials of all his other books. Into it he poured the accumulated cream of his hidden *Notes*. After working upon it intermittently for fourteen years he was still far from satisfied, and he died without

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being able to carry out the revision he intended. Feeling unable to decide as to its merits, he yet left instructions that it should be published. "This may", he said, "for aught I feel clearly about it, be very good or very bad. Some good things I know are in it." It was a fine example of his dictum that "nothing is ever any good unless it is thwarted with self-distrust though in the main self-confident".

It has been already said that *The Way of All Flesh* is the archetype of the First Novel. To this it must be added that it is the first and only novel of a non-fiction writer in the full flush of his maturity. That is to say, it is the work of a brilliant and well-disciplined amateur.

Butler was not, and never could have become, anything approximating to the professional novelist. For his five years or so in New Zealand he was a professional sheep farmer, and he became a professional bachelor. But he was, and all his life he remained, an amateur painter, an amateur musician, an amateur scientist, an amateur psychologist, an amateur philosopher, an amateur theologian, an amateur art critic. Invariably he had to pay publishers to print his books. On one occasion several consecutive publishers, fearful of ridicule, refused to undertake publication even for cash down. With the single exception of his first book, *Erewhon*, which appeared anonymously and brought him a trifling sum, he was always out of pocket with his ventures—thirteen books in all, if we include his two translations from Homer which dropped dead from the press.

Almost as unexceptionably none but amateur literary critics, who were also personal friends, dared to print praise of any of his works, while the professional critics and the unpaid professional authorities either ignored him or heaped upon him their informed obloquies. *The*

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Times could feel justified in refusing so much as one line to announce his rendering of the *Iliad* into English. His intrusion into so many different realms, not merely without the official cachet but using unfamiliar weapons with intent to demolish the pretensions of those who had it, was in itself a good enough excuse for the people of importance in each realm to condemn or to slight him with silence. He held himself insultingly aloof from the vogues of his day, such as the Pre-Raphaelite activity. His addiction to irony when he was most in earnest baffled his simpler readers or led them to mistake his meaning. Naturally the general public was not attracted to read his books.

Being not only penetrating and painstaking, but of an ardent nature that had chosen as its heroes those whom it found to be most "lofty, impassioned, tender and full alike of fire and of the love of play", he was hurt by this reception, but he was not stopped. He was made of different stuff from his contemporary Thomas Hardy, who, after the hostile notices of *Jude the Obscure*, retired as a novelist into dignified silence.

For Butler, besides being one of our great English amateurs, was one of our great missionaries. In his own words he was "fearless and thorough-going" in all those things to which he was awake, and he was pretty wide-awake. He remained incorrigible before the divided fronts of Science and the Church, the critics and the thoughtless. He would neither abandon his message nor change his tactics. His was the most difficult of rôles, that of a serious *enfant terrible* whose remarks are concertedly ignored. This, in spite of the compromise he preached.

It suited his humour to ascribe his recalcitrant perseverance to his possession of private means. Underneath, as he might have put it, were the Everlasting Arms of his

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father's money. Having, at the worst, "enough to live on", he could afford to "attack people who were at once unscrupulous and powerful", "to make no alliances", and to go on writing the books he did because he "did not want to be bored and have my time wasted and my pleasures curtailed". But making all allowances for the truth, the modesty and the humour of such statements, he made others by which we are assured that, had he been unendowed, he would none the less have managed things so that what he took to be his first duty should not go unperformed. The Everlasting Arms might have been less comfortable than they were when padded by a father's grudging allowance, and he might have had further to fall into them, but they would have been there all the same. We may even amuse ourselves by fancying that as a penniless man he might have been either a more prolific or a more popular writer, in which events he would have won for himself a more homely or a more timely nest of fame. Or, perhaps, like Jesus, Bernard Shaw and James Joyce, he might have obtained the financial support of some sapient and god-fearing lady. If he was enabled by his father to build his twiggy raft of immortality, by the same gift he was prevented from feathering it, and his occupation of it was the longer postponed. Undoubtedly the circumstances of his income, its fluctuations, and the frequent threats of its removal, urged upon him, as it would not upon many men, the necessity of doing that work which he felt himself to be "just the man to do". Samuel Butler put forth nothing that was not in his view "perfectly righteous". Total lack of money would not have made him different in this cardinal point if the presence of money and the embarrassments which arose from its presence (largely through his own mistakes) could not corrupt him. And, his income notwithstanding-

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ing, he had to live in the belief that "posterity will give a man a fair hearing".

He had to die in it too. Finishing his earthly life in 1902, one year after Queen Victoria finished hers, when he was two years and a half short of the shorter of the allotted spans of the Psalmist, he was obliged to be content with nothing but his own conviction that he had earned an equal span for his posthumous existence. "I could not keep myself going at all", he confessed, "if I did not believe that I was likely to inherit a good average of three-score years and ten of immortality."

It was not simply a pious death-bed hope. It had been the slow-growing faith of his mature life, year after discouraging year. He had found it the hardest thing, but also the best worth while, "to possess one's soul in peace and not be shaken in faith and broken in spirit on seeing the way in which men crowd themselves, or are crowded, into honourable remembrance when, if the truth concerning them were known, no pit of oblivion should be deep enough for them". In the *Note-Books*, where his life is laid open, he recurs again and again to this belief that for him the pit of oblivion would be undeserved. And whether his expression of it is light, firm or wistful, as it is by turns, we are conscious that here he is revealing what mattered most to him. From necessity dictated by the cold reception of his work, and therefore all the more from virtue, he desired above any other possession "a well-earned good fame in death". He would not, one thinks, have admitted that with him the longing was akin to what his favourite English author—embittered as himself though with a different flavour to his bitterness—called "the last infirmity of noble minds". For Butler it was rather the *raison d'être* of all nobility, the more that he cherished no other illusion of personal survival. The

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extension of life on earth by fame after death was not merely his Refuge from the Stormy Blast of the here, but his Eternal Home of the hereafter. It was the core of his religion, and it was with the modesty and common sense of true religion that he limited his own "immortality" to the "good average" of a man's living allowance. He knew too much to care for what human beings of times further distant than those of his non-existent grandchildren might feel about him. Or, perhaps, he knew enough to be fairly sure that if a man's fame holds for seventy years it has the prospect of renewing itself like the eagle (or the phoenix) in unlooked-for cycles of later time.

It is now close upon a hundred years since our author was born in a Nottinghamshire rectory, but that after-life on which his heart was set is only in its thirty-fourth year. Thirty-four is a long way off seventy. It even falls short by some sixteen years of the time he consciously spent in preparing for it. By 1950 Butler's predicted period will still have another twenty-two years to run. It remains to be known what the critics of the year 2000 will have to say of him that will then be of more than museum interest. Will his wit, his thoughts, his findings about life, which sometimes cost him so much to record that for many months together he "could not breathe properly", retain their vitality at that date in the minds of vigorous readers? Will his peculiar individuality, which has stimulated so many readers now middle-aged, and has provided a quarry for so many writers, endear itself with any force to young openers of his *Note-Books* next century?

We must bear in mind that Butler's notion of posthumous fame was not that of a Great Name, which, as he was painfully aware, may be scarcely distinguishable from that of a Great Bore. He wanted something correspond-

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ing to the warm and vibrating survival of a Shakespeare in men's intimate and everyday experience. His French mistress, who, it may be, knew more about him than is discounted by his biographer's remark that the relation was a purely business one, is reported to have said of him, "il sait tout; il ne sait rien; il est poète". And whether Madame said this or not, her faithful twice-weekly caller knew that the survival he coveted and worked for has in general been most firmly assured to those whose approach to life was, *au fond*, both poetic and sensual. He desired a place—

Where dead men live, on lips of living men.

Posthumous fame as accorded by the critics and measured by inches in the *Dictionary of National Biography* would have seemed more like hell than like heaven to him.

O Critics, cultured Critics!

Who will praise me after I am dead,

Who will see in me both more and less than I intended,

But who will swear that whatever it was it was all perfectly right:

You will think you are better than the people who, when I was alive,
swore that whatever I did was wrong

And damned my books for me as fast as I could write them;

But you will not be better, you will be just the same, neither better
nor worse,

And you will go for some future Butler as your fathers have gone
for me.

Oh! How I should have hated you!

So he addressed himself "To Critics and Others".

Nothing could be easier than to dispose of *The Way of All Flesh* by saying that it is a revolutionary novel attacking the institution of the family. But it is and does no such thing. Butler was no revolutionary. For one occasion that he urges you to go ahead, he pulls you up—or trips you up—ten times. The idea of the abolition of family life would have horrified him. His youth coin-

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cided with the height of that "attempt to prolong family connection unduly", which was almost universally considered as a virtuous aim. And in his experience "more unhappiness came from this source than from any other". It was a "Pharisaism of the time". Accordingly this was his ostensible theme in what was an attack upon many Pharisaisms, besides being an *apologia pro vita sua*. Already in English novels and plays, as in novels and plays elsewhere, the domineering father had for centuries figured as a stock character. Gibbon had ventured to note that, much as sons might love their fathers, few would wish to resurrect them after six months. True, it was a long step even from such a pronouncement to Butler's far-reaching diagnosis. Moreover, Butler had a new variation of the paternal theme, because the Victorian father was enlightened. Particularly if he was a clergyman he had rung out the old and rung in the new. Neither before nor since have the relations, which could and often did exist between eminently worthy fathers and their equally worthy offspring, been more brilliantly revealed in their unsuspected atrociousness. *The Way of All Flesh* made a book like Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* possible, but where the later effort is inert in its truth-telling the earlier is dynamic. In the development of the English novel it has the place of a boulder thrown into mid-stream—a boulder laboriously and skilfully hewn to stand four-square and to divert and direct many waters.

But its power lies in something deeper than its stated subject and in something far deeper than its most far-reaching theories—novel then but commonplaces today—of heredity and education, or its announcements, now generally accepted, of the association between crime and disease or between action and the unconscious. All these help to give it stiffening, just as its fads and paradoxes help

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to give it its peculiar and delightful flavour, notwithstanding that the fads may elicit from us the wrong kind of smiles, or that the paradoxes do not always come off—for the mechanical reversing of a truism was wrongly regarded by Butler as an infallible organon of truth.

The life of the novel flows from its author's recognition, backed by all his wit and his extraordinary practical sense, that the way of all flesh is to bully and to be bullied by other flesh with infinite variations of subtlety, and that, therefore, the utmost intelligence and courage must be employed by each new being that would not be defrauded of its birthright. Neither bullies nor the bullied can love God, and "we know"—or Butler reminds us—that it is only "to them that love God" that "all things work together for good".

Fathers today are no longer greatly to be feared by sons. Yet bullying has not ceased, and birthrights have still sometimes to be stolen or foregone. Butler's book stands as the greatest set of directions ever penned on the successful stealing of one's birthright. When Shaw said of him that he was "the only man known to history who has immortalized and actually endeared himself by parricide and matricide long drawn-out", he dwelt, purposely no doubt, rather upon the letter than upon the spirit. On the other hand, when to somebody's remark that Butler was no better than his father, Shaw replied that this was inexact because he was a great deal worse, we feel that a truth has been spoken. Convictions of our own enlightenment have never yet obviated our capacities as bullies or made the failure of resistance to bullying in ourselves or others less disastrous. Perhaps, after all, this was Butler's reason for avoiding fatherhood himself. Where there was a possibility of temptation he was a great believer in obliquity.

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Henry James

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By Graham Greene

THE technical qualities of Henry James's novels have been so often and so satisfactorily explored, notably by Mr Percy Lubbock, that perhaps I may be forgiven for ignoring James as the fully conscious craftsman in order that I may try to track the instinctive, the poetic writer back to the source of his fantasies. In all writers there occurs a moment of crystallization when the dominant theme is plainly expressed, when the private universe becomes visible even to the least sensitive reader. Such a crystallization is Hardy's often-quoted phrase: "The President of the Immortals . . . had ended his sport with Tess", or that passage in his preface to *Jude the Obscure*, when he writes of "the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity". It is less easy to find such a crystallization in the works of James, whose chief aim was always to dramatize, who was more than usually careful to exclude the personal statement, but I think we may take the sentence in the scenario of *The Ivory Tower*, in which James speaks of "the black and merciless things that are behind great possessions" as an expression of the ruling fantasy which drove him to write: a sense of evil religious in its intensity.

"Art itself", Conrad wrote, "may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the

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visible universe", and no definition in his own prefaces better describes the object Henry James so passionately pursued, if the word visible does not exclude the private vision. If there are times when we feel, in *The Sacred Fount*, even in the exquisite *Golden Bowl*, that the judge is taking too much into consideration, that he could have passed his sentence on less evidence, we have always to admit as the long record of human corruption unrolls that he has never allowed us to lose sight of the main case; and because his mind is bent on rendering even evil "the highest kind of justice", the symmetry of his thought lends the whole body of his work the importance of a system.

No writer has left a series of novels more of one moral piece. The differences between James's first works and his last are only differences of art as Conrad defined it. In his early work perhaps he rendered a little less than the highest kind of justice; the progress from *The American* to *The Golden Bowl* is a progress from a rather crude and inexperienced symbolization of truth to truth itself: a progress from evil represented rather obviously in terms of murder to evil in *propria persona*, walking down Bond Street, charming, cultured, sensitive—evil to be distinguished from good only in the complete egotism of its outlook. They are complete anarchists, these later Jamesian characters, they form the immoral background to that extraordinary period of haphazard violence which anticipated the war: the attempt on Greenwich Observatory, the siege of Sidney Street. They lent the tone which made possible the cruder manifestations presented by Conrad in *The Secret Agent*. Merton Densher, who planned to marry the dying Millie Theale for her money, plotting with his mistress who was her best friend; Prince Amerigo, who betrayed his wife with her friend, her father's wife; Horton, who swindled his friend

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Gray of his money: the last twist (it is always the friend, the intimate who betrays) is given to these studies of moral corruption. They represent an attitude which had been James's from very far back; they are not the slow painful fruit of experience. The attitude never varied from the time of *The American* onwards. Mme. de Bellegarde, who murdered her husband and sold her daughter, is only the first crude presentation of a woman gradually subtilized, by way of Madame Merle in *The Portrait of a Lady*, into the incomparable figures of evil, Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant.

This point is of importance. James has been too often regarded as a novelist of superficial experience, as a painter of social types, who was cut off by exile from the deepest roots of experience (as if there were something superior in the Sussex or Shropshire of the localized talent to James's international scene). But James was not in that sense an exile; he could have dispensed with the international scene as easily as he dispensed with all the world of Wall Street finance. For the roots were not in Venice, Paris, London; they were in himself. Densher, the Prince, just as much as the redhaired valet Quint and the adulterous governess, were rooted in his own character. They were there when he wrote *The American* in 1876: all he needed afterwards to perfect his work to his own impeccable standard was technical subtlety and that other subtlety which comes from superficial observation, the ability to construct convincing masks for his own personality.

I do not use superficial in any disparaging sense. If his practice pieces, from *The Europeans* to *The Tragic Muse*, didn't engage his full powers, and were certainly not the vehicle for his most urgent fantasies, they were examples

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of sharp observation, the fruits of a direct objective experience, unsurpassed in their kind. He never again proved himself capable of drawing a portrait so directly, with such command of relevant detail. We know Charlotte Stant, of course, more thoroughly than we know Miss Birdseye in *The Bostonians*, but she emerges gradually through the long book, we don't "see" her with the immediacy that we see Miss Birdseye:

She was a little old lady with an enormous head; that was the first thing Ransom noticed—the vast, fair, protuberant, candid, ungarnished brow, surmounting a pair of weak, kind, tired-looking eyes. . . . The long practice of philanthropy had not given accent to her features; it had rubbed out their transitions, their meanings. . . . In her large countenance her dim little smile scarcely showed. It was a mere sketch of a smile, a kind of instalment, or payment on account; it seemed to say that she would smile more if she had time, but that you could see, without this, that she was gentle and easy to beguile. . . . She looked as if she had spent her life on platforms, in audiences, in conventions, in phalansteries, in séances; in her faded face there was a kind of reflexion of ugly lecture-lamps.

No writer's apprentice work contains so wide and brilliant a range of portraits from this very early Miss Birdseye to Mrs Brookenham in *The Awkward Age*:

Mrs Brookenham was, in her forty-first year, still charmingly pretty, and the nearest approach she made at this moment to meeting her son's description of her was by looking beautifully desperate. She had about her the pure light of youth—would always have it; her head, her figure, her flexibility, her flickering colour, her lovely, silly eyes, her natural, quavering tone, all played together towards this effect by some trick that had never yet been exposed. It was at the same time remarkable that—at least in the bosom of her family—she rarely wore an appearance of gaiety less qualified than at the present juncture; she suggested for the most part the luxury, the novelty of woe, the excitement of strange sorrows and the cultivation of fine indifferencies. This was her special sign—an innocence dimly tragic. It gave immense effect to her other resources. . . .

The Awkward Age stands formidably between the two

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halves of James's achievement. It marks his decision to develop finally from *The American* rather than from *The Europeans*. It is the surrender of experience to fantasy. He hadn't found his method, but he had definitely found his theme. One may regret, in some moods, that his more superficial books had so few successors (English literature has too little that is light, lucid and witty), but one cannot be surprised that he discarded many of them from the collected edition while retaining so crude a fiction as *The American*, discarded even the delicate, feline *Washington Square*, perhaps the only novel in which a man has successfully invaded the feminine field and produced work comparable to Jane Austen's.

How could he have done otherwise if he was to be faithful to his deeper personal fantasy? He wrote of "poor Flaubert" that

he stopped too short. He hovered for ever at the public door, in the outer court, the splendour of which very properly beguiled him, and in which he seems still to stand as upright as a sentinel and as shapely as a statue. But that immobility and even that erectness were paid too dear. The shining arms were meant to carry further, the outer doors were meant to open. He should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul. This would have floated him on a deeper tide; above all it would have calmed his nerves.

His early novels, except *The American*, certainly belonged to the outer court. They had served their purpose, he had improved his masks, he was never to be more witty; but when he emerged from them again to take up his main study of corruption in *The Wings of a Dove* he had amazingly advanced: instead of murder, the more agonizing mental violence; instead of Mme. de Bellegarde, Kate Croy; instead of the melodramatic heroine Mme. de Cintré, the deeply felt, subjective study of Millie Theale.

For to render the highest justice to corruption you

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must retain your innocence: you have to be conscious all the time within yourself of treachery to something valuable. If Peter Quint is to be rooted in you, so must the child his ghost corrupts; if Osmund, Isabel Archer too. These centres of innocence, these objects of treachery, are nearly always women: the lovely daring Isabel Archer, who goes out in her high-handed wealthy way to meet life and falls to Osmund; Nanda, the young girl "coming out", who is hemmed in by a vicious social set; Millie Theale, sick to death just at the time when life has most to offer, surrendering to Merton Densher and Kate Croy (apart from Quint and the Governess the most driven and "damned" of all James's characters); Maggie Verver, the unsophisticated "good" young American who encounters her particular corruption in the Prince and Charlotte Stant; the child Maisie tossed about among grown-up adulteries. These are the points of purity in the dark picture.

The attitude of mind which dictated these situations was a permanent one. Henry James had a marvellous facility for covering up his tracks (can we be blamed if we assume he had a reason?). In his magnificent prefaces he describes the geneses of his stories, where they were written, the method he adopted, the problems he faced: he seems, like the conjuror with rolled sleeves, to show everything. But you have to go further back than the anecdote at the dinner-table to trace the origin of such urgent fantasies. In this exploration his prefaces, even his autobiographies, offer very little help. Certainly they give his model for goodness; he is less careful to obliterate *that* trail back into youth (if one can speak of care in connexion with a design which was probably only half-conscious if it was conscious at all). His cousin,

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Mary Temple, was the model, a model in her deadly sickness and her high courage, above all in her hungry grip on life, for Millie Theale in particular.

She had [James wrote of her] beyond any equally young creature I have known a sense for verity of character and play of life in others, for their acting out of their force or their weakness, whatever either might be, at no matter what cost to herself. . . . Life claimed her and used her and beset her—made her range in her groping: her naturally immature and unlighted way from end to end of the scale. . . . She was absolutely afraid of nothing she might come to by living with enough sincerity and enough wonder; and I think it is because one was to see her launched on that adventure in such bedimmed, such almost tragically compromised conditions that one is caught by her title to the heroic and pathetic mask.

Mary Temple then, whatever mask she wore, was always the point of purity, but again one must seek further if one is to trace the source of James's passionate distrust in human nature, his sense of evil. Mary Temple was experience, but that other sense, one feels, was born in him, was his inheritance.

It cannot but seem odd how little in his volumes of reminiscence, *A Small Boy and Others* and *Notes of a Son and Brother*, Henry James really touches the subject of his family. His style is at its most complex: the beauty of the books is very like the beauty of Turner's later pictures: they are all air and light: you have to look a long while into their glow before you discern the most tenuous outline of their subjects. Certainly of the two main figures, Henry James, Senior, and William James, you learn nothing of what must have been to them of painful importance: their sense of daemonic possession.

James was to draw the figure of Peter Quint with his little red whiskers and his white damned face, he was to show Densher and Kate writhing in their hopeless infernal sundering success; evil was overwhelmingly part of his

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visible universe; but the sense (we get no indication of it in his reminiscences) was a family sense. He shared it with his father and brother and sister. One may find the dark source of his deepest fantasy concealed in a family life which for sensitive boys must have been almost ideally free from compulsions, a tolerant cultured life led between Concord and Geneva. For nearly two years his father was intermittently attacked by a sense of "perfectly insane and abject terror" (his own words); a damned shape seemed to squat beside him raying out "a fetid influence". Henry James's sister, Alice, was a prey to suicidal tendencies, and William James suffered in much the same way as his father.

I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. . . . This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I*, I felt potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before. . . . It gradually faded, but for months I was unable to go out into the dark alone.

This epileptic idiot, this urge towards death, the damned shape, are a more important background to Henry James's novels than Grosvenor House and late Victorian society. It is true that the moral anarchy of the age gave him his material, but he would not have treated it with such

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intensity if it had not corresponded with his private fantasy. They were materialists, his characters, but you cannot read far in Henry James's novels without realizing that their creator was not a materialist. If ever a man's imagination was clouded by the Pit, it was James's. When he touches this nerve, the fear of spiritual evil, he treats the reader with less than his usual frankness: "a fairy tale pure and simple", something seasonable for Christmas, is a disingenuous description of *The Turn of the Screw*. One cannot avoid a conviction that here he touched and recoiled from an important inhibition.

It was just because the visible universe which he was so careful to treat with the highest kind of justice was determined for him at an early age that his family background is of such interest. There are two other odd gaps in his autobiographies; his two brothers, Wilky and Bob, play in them an infinitesimal part. To Miss Burr, the editor of Alice James's journal, we owe most of our knowledge of these almost commonplace, almost low-brow members of a family intellectual even to excess. To Wilky "the act of reading was inhuman and repugnant"; he wrote from his brigade, "Tell Harry that I am waiting anxiously for his 'next'. I can find a large sale for any blood-and-thunder tale among the darks." From his brigade: that was the point. It was the two failures, Wilky and Bob, who at eighteen and seventeen represented the family on the battlefields of the Civil War. William's eyesight was always bad, and Henry escaped because of an accident, the exact nature of which has always remained a mystery. One is glad, of course, that he escaped the obvious effects of war: Wilky was ruined physically, Bob nervously; both drifted in the manner of war-time heroes from farming in Florida to petty business careers in Milwaukee;

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and it is not improbable that the presence of these ruined heroes helped to keep Henry James out of America.

Is it possible that through Wilky and Bob we can trace the source of James's main fantasy, the idea of treachery which was always attached to his sense of evil? James had not, so far as we know, been betrayed, like Monteith, like Gray, like Millie Theale and Maggie Verver and Isabel Archer, by his best friend, and it would have taken surely a very deep betrayal to explain an impulse which dictated *The American* in 1876 and *The Golden Bowl* in 1905, which attached itself to the family sense of supernatural evil and produced his great gallery of the damned. It takes some form of self-betrayal to dig so deep, and one need not go, like some of his modern critics, to a "castration complex" to find the reason. There are psychological clues which point to James having evaded military service with insufficient excuse. A civil war is not a continental squabble: its motives are usually deeper, represent less superficial beliefs on the part of the ordinary combatant, and the James family at Concord were at the very spot where the motives of the North sounded at their noblest. His accident has an air of mystery about it (that is why some of his critics have imagined a literal castration), and one needs some explanation of his almost hysterical participation in the Great War on the side of a civilization about which he had no illusions, over whose corruption he had swapped amusing anecdotes with Alice. It will be remembered that in his magnificent study of treachery, *A Round of Visits*, Monteith's betrayer, like all the others, was a very near friend. "To live thus with his unremoved, undestroyed, engaging, treacherous face, had been, as our traveller desired, to live with all of the felt pang." His unremoved face, the felt pang: it is not hard

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to believe that James suffered from a long subconscious uneasiness about a personal failure.

This, then, was his visible universe: visible indeed if it faced him daily in his glass: the treachery of friends, the meanest kind of lies, "the black and merciless things", as he wrote himself in the scenario of *The Golden Bowl*, "that are behind great possessions". But it is perhaps the measure of his greatness, of the wideness and justice of his view, that critics of an older generation, Mr Desmond MacCarthy among them, have seen him primarily as a friendly, rather covetous follower of the "best" society. The sense of evil never obsessed him, as it obsessed Dostoevsky; he never ceased to be primarily an artist, unlike those driven geniuses, Lawrence and Tolstoy, and he could always throw off from the superfluity of his talent such exquisite amiable fragments as *Daisy Miller* and *The Pension Beaurepas*: satire so gentle, even while so witty, that it has the quality of nostalgia, a looking back towards a way of life simple and unreflecting, with a kind of innocence even in its greed. "Common she might be," he wrote of Daisy Miller, "yet what provision was made by that epithet for her queer little native grace." It is in these diversions, these lovely little marginalia, that the Marxist critic, just as much as Mr MacCarthy, finds his material. He was a social critic only when he was not a religious one. No writer was more conscious that he was at the end of a period, at the end of the society he knew. It was revolution he quite explicitly foresaw; he spoke of the class, as I seemed to see it, that had had the longest and happiest innings in history . . . and for whom the future wasn't going to be, by most signs, anything like so bland and benedictory as the past. . . . I cannot say how vivid I felt the drama so preparing might become—that of the lapse of immemorial protection, that of the finally complete exposure of the immemorially protected.

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But the Marxist, just as much as the older critics, are dwelling on the marginalia. Wealth may have been almost invariably connected with the treacheries he described, but so was passion. When he was floating on his fullest tide, "listening", as he put it, "at the chamber of the soul", the evil of capitalist society is an altogether inadequate explanation of his theme. It was not the desire of money alone which united Densher and Kate, and the author of *The Spoils of Poynton* would no more have condemned passion than the author of *The Ambassadors* would have condemned private wealth. His lot and his experience happened to lie among the great possessions, but "the black and merciless things" were no more intrinsically part of a capitalist than of a socialist system: they belonged to human nature. They amounted really to this: an egotism so complete that you could believe that something inhuman, supernatural, was working there through the poor devils it had chosen.

In *The Jolly Corner* Bridon, the cultured American expatriate, returned to his New York home and found it haunted. He hunted the ghost down. It was afraid of him (the origin of that twist is known to us. In *A Small Boy* James has described the childish dream he built his story on). He drove it to bay in its evening dress under the skylight in the hall, discovered in the "evil, odious, blatant, vulgar" features the reflection of himself. This was what he would have been if he had stayed and joined the Wall Street racket and prospered. It is easy to take the mere social criticism implied, but I have yet to find socialist or conservative who can feel any pity for the evil he denounces, and the final beauty of James's stories lies in their pity: "The poetry is in the pity". His egotists, poor souls, are as pitiable as Lucifer. The woman Bridon loved had also seen the ghost; he had not appeared less

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blatant, less vulgar to her with his ruined sight and maimed hand and million a year, but the emotion she chiefly felt was pity.

"He has been unhappy, he has been ravaged," she said.

"And haven't I been unhappy? Am not I—you've only to look at me!—ravaged?"

"Ah, I don't say I like him *better*," she granted after a thought. "But he's grim, he's worn—and things have happened to him. He doesn't make shift, for sight, with your charming monocle."

James wasn't a prophet; he hadn't a didactic purpose; he wished only to render the highest kind of justice, and you cannot render the highest kind of justice if you hate. He was a realist: he had to show the triumphs of egotism; he was a realist: he had to show that a damned soul has its chains. Millie Theale, Maggie Verver, these "good" people had their escapes, they were lucky in that they loved, could sacrifice themselves like Wilky and Bob, they were never quite alone on the bench of desolation. But the egotists had no escape, there was no tenderness in their passion and their pursuit of money was often no more than an interest, a hobby: they were, inescapably, themselves. Kate and Merton Densher get the money for which they'd schemed; they don't get each other. Charlotte Stant and the Prince satisfy their passion at the expense of a lifetime of separation.

This is not "poetic justice"; it was not as a moralist that James designed his stories, but as a realist. His family background, his personal failure, determined his view of the visible universe when he first began to write, and there was nothing in the society of his time to make him reconsider his view. He had always been strictly just to the truth as he saw it, and all that his deepening experience had done for him was to alter a murder to an adultery, but while in *The American* he had not pitied the murderer, in

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The Golden Bowl he had certainly learned to pity the adulterers. There was no victory for human beings, that was his conclusion; you were punished in your own way, whether you were of God's or the Devil's party. James believed in the supernatural, but he saw evil as an equal force with good. Humanity was cannon fodder in a war too balanced ever to be concluded. If he had been guilty himself of the supreme egotism of preserving his own existence, he left the material, in his profound unsparing analysis, for rendering even egotism the highest kind of justice, of giving the devil his due.

It brought Spencer Brydon to his feet. "You 'like' that horror——?"

"I *could* have liked him. And to me," she said, "he was no horror. I had accepted him."

"I had accepted him." James, who had never taken a great interest in his father's Swedenborgianism, had gathered enough to strengthen his own older more traditional heresy. For his father believed, in his own words, that "the evil or hellish element in our nature, even when out of divine order . . . is yet not only no less vigorous than the latter, but on the contrary much more vigorous, sagacious and productive of eminent earthly uses" (so one might describe the acquisition of Millie Theale's money). The difference, of course, was greater than the resemblance. The son was not an optimist, he didn't share his father's hopes of the hellish element, he only pitied those who were immersed in it; and it is in the final justice of his pity, the completeness of an analysis which enabled him to pity the most shabby, the most corrupt, of his human actors, that he ranks with the greatest of creative writers. He is as solitary in the history of the novel as Shakespeare in the history of poetry.

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Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy

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By H. E. Bates

THE placing together of Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad in the lineage of English novelists leads me at once to two reflections. First, that although their lives cover very nearly the same period of time, in a century when the English novel is popularly supposed to have been at its greatest, their work in tone and artistry and feeling and setting belongs not only to different centuries but almost to different worlds, Hardy's to a world that often seems to us as unreal and dated and strange as a Victorian fashion-plate, Conrad's to a world as unreal and strange in a vastly different sense but as undated as the sea and the stars and the sunlight of which he wrote so well. And secondly, that although the English are known and have been renowned for centuries both as a nation of seafarers and sea-lovers and as men lovingly and necessarily preoccupied with the earth, a nation in whose development seamen and farmers have played an immense part, English literature can show only two writers of classic substance whose work has for its foundation the soil and the sea. Why this should be I do not pretend to know and it is not within the scope of this essay to prove. It may be a mere coincidence that Hardy is alone in his position as the novelist of English rural life and that Conrad as a novelist of the sea has no one to rival him but

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Marryat. But if it is, then it is one of the oddest coincidences in English literature. For the sea and the land between them must have inspired more English poets than any other subjects except women and love and flowers. Nor is it that English prose, or more especially the English novel, is barren of all reference to earth and sea; but only that we have no dramatic novelist except Conrad occupied entirely with the sea, and no novelist of the same calibre as Hardy occupied, even though not quite so entirely, with the drama of English rural life and character.

This point is, I think, worth making; for with the exception of one other characteristic, a point of greater importance to which I will refer in a moment, Hardy and Conrad have little in common. Born in 1840, Hardy was confined from that very moment to the moment of his death nearly a century later by the boundaries of an age in which morality played a larger part in literature than ever before or since. The England that Hardy knew was supercharged with a consciousness of right and wrong; and Hardy, though the rights and wrongs of his characters were on a higher plane and were seen from his own refined and ennobled viewpoint, was supercharged with that consciousness too. He could hardly help it, but it made him and to my mind has kept him, in spite of his occasional greatness, a provincial writer. Born in 1857, only a little later, Conrad never suffered from the confines of morality or time or place. He is not provincial, but cosmopolitan. It is not that his range of character was any greater than Hardy's, or that in mere verbal dexterity and passionate intensity he had Hardy beaten into a cocked hat, but simply that there is in him a basic difference in make-up, mobility of mind and range of moral attitude. It is the difference between chalk and cheese, between a man of one nationality and another, between

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the sardonic Englishman and the sardonic Pole. Hardy is so much the Englishman that we do not need to think of it; we take it for granted. Whereas Conrad gets extra credit for the romantic fact of his nationality, for being the Pole who learnt English and mastered it and finally wrote novels in it. In this sense Conrad starts with an advantage over Hardy. He himself was a romantic figure; Hardy was never romantic. Conrad was the adventurer; Hardy the home-bird. But these are slight differences compared with the difference in blood, the difference which makes one animal a race-horse and another a cart-horse, the difference which in fact made Conrad an aristocrat and Hardy scarcely as high as middle-class. Looking at Conrad's portraits, reading his life, analysing his novels, it is difficult to imagine him as anything but the aristocrat, as a man in some exalted position, a being of refined instincts and intelligence and sensibility. It requires no imagination to see Conrad as a diplomat, a refined connoisseur, a high official, an artist. Whereas with Hardy it is hard to imagine him as being even remotely connected with art and refinement at all; with that curious, stunted shrewd figure he might have been a clerk, a shopkeeper, a saddler, a shoemaker, a local preacher, a newsagent, or in fact the stonemason that he once was.

And just as one cannot escape these differences in the men themselves, so one is constantly confronted with them in the novels. Hardy is the cart-horse, Conrad the race-horse, and appropriately Hardy's novels seem to me to resemble in form and progress and solidity those big, splendidly built but laborious wagons which must have been so common in his day, wagons heavily laden with goods and going on long journeys and made to resist the conflict of time and circumstance. On the other hand, the work of Conrad, verbose though it is, moves more

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swiftly, far more beautifully, and at infinitely higher blood-pressure. His novels are like the spirited courses of a sensitive animal, passionate, intense, fiery, graceful, all that a fine animal in a race can be. By contrast Hardy stumbles along, halting often, stopping at inns on the roadside, his eye on the weather, picking up characters, philosophizing, taking an unconscionable time to get to his destination, but getting there at last.

So the catalogue of their dissimilarities might go on. Moreover, as large a catalogue of differences would be inevitable were Hardy to be replaced by almost any other English novelist, for English novelists are apt to be very English, where Conrad is the elusive cosmopolitan figure of no nationality at all. Conrad may be likened to no other English novelist except, inevitably, Marryat. But there are many similarities between, for instance, Hardy and Meredith, and we are already familiar with the similarities between Hardy and George Eliot, similarities which provoked that remark of cruel truth—"Hardy is one of George Eliot's many miscarriages"—for which George Moore is famous. True, similarities between Hardy and Conrad are by no means non-existent, even though they happen to be virtues which either might share with any other great novelist of their time. Both are philosophers, both ironists, both tragedians, both remorseless. The characters of them both are meant to be cast in heroic mould, though it is the relentless mould of time and fate which finally shapes them, with the result that their characters are in reality not heroes at all, but victims. Especially in Hardy are they victims. But none of these things are technical virtues, none of them are part of the novelist's craft. And in one respect, a technical aspect, Hardy and Conrad are equally remarkable. They are both masters of atmosphere.

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Atmosphere is the second in importance of all the novelist's virtues. It is certainly greater in importance than plot; and there are times when it may play an even more important part than character. Character, we know, is plot, but atmosphere may be even more. It is true that characters may emanate their own atmosphere, as flowers give off their scents. But the character that gives off no atmosphere of its own and has none supplied by its creator is as flat and lifeless as a sheet of paper. There are, I imagine, recipes for character; there are certainly recipes for plots; but there is no recipe for the creation of atmosphere, for the subtle evocation of the breath, sound, silence, colour and even the taste of scenes and moods, an art in which both Hardy and Conrad excelled. The atmosphere of their novels has an astonishingly enduring and even haunting quality. When the motives and emotions of the characters in *The Return of the Native* have become confused and hard to recall and even meaningless, the brooding air of Egdon Heath, captured in the single first paragraph of the book, remains as powerfully in the mind as ever. And when the name of every character in *The Woodlanders* has been forgotten, the lovely pastoral air of the book endures like a breath of a summer. Similarly, but perhaps even more remarkably, with Conrad: the heat of tropical sunlight, the tranquillity of a warm night at sea, the exoticism of strange islands, the beauty of the sea itself, the mystery and enchantment of remote places—all these lie far more securely in the mind than the actions and sufferings and even the fates of even Conrad's remarkably enduring characters. Mr Desmond MacCarthy once remarked that, though it had been perhaps twenty-five or thirty years since he had read the novels of Turgenev, their perfectly realized and sustained lyricism of atmosphere remained as freshly in his

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mind as ever. And here, for me, more than half the greatness of both Conrad and Hardy lies. In this respect they are both masters, controlling and using to the full effect the most precious of the novelist's instincts—the subtle evocation of the atmosphere of their chosen worlds.

And what oddly opposed worlds they are—what worlds of difference there are between them! Conrad may be said to have been the poet of magical horizons, Hardy the surveyor of the whole Victorian system of morality and the architecture of the soul. Conrad is the dreamer, Hardy the builder. To Conrad plot was nothing, to Hardy it was everything. In Hardy it is what the characters do or have done to them by fate that is important; in Conrad it is not what the characters do but what they afterwards feel and think and suffer. Hardy is the accomplished—far too accomplished—novelist of fatalistic coincidence, Conrad the novelist of chance. In the works of both the dice is loaded; but whereas in Conrad we have the impression that fate has loaded it, in Hardy we feel that although fate is *supposed* to have loaded it, the loading has in reality been done by Hardy himself.

Take *Tess*—almost the only novel of Hardy's in which a single character is great enough to transcend the too-crushing mechanisms of plot. *Tess* has for its sub-title *A Pure Woman*. Why? Why this careful preliminary emphasis on purity? Why this laboured attempt on Hardy's part to establish *Tess* as an emblem of chastity before the book begins? Obviously it is, I think, because the dice is loaded before the book begins, and that Hardy knows only too well that it is loaded for the simple reason that he has loaded it himself. *Tess* was not only doomed in the book but—in Hardy's day at any rate—doomed outside it too. Poor *Tess*!—she was victimized both ways, by Hardy on the one side and by Victorian England on

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the other. With Tess the cry is not *'Tis Pity she's a Whore!* but *'Tis Pity she is Pure!* And Hardy knew that—he knew that whatever he might think, Victorian England would think the opposite. Tess for him might be the purest of the pure, but for the Victorians that very purity was the secret of the trouble. A wanton labelled wanton, yes—but not a wanton labelled pure.

But today Tess is neither pure nor wanton. Why indeed should she be? Her little misdeed, on which after all the whole book depends, arouses in the modern reader no feelings of moral outrage or disgust. Why is it? Tess herself has not changed, the printed word remains as Hardy left it. But clearly there is a change somewhere, and clearly it must be either in us or in contemporary standards of morality. And since we are asked to judge Tess by standards of purity the change is clearly in morality itself. Morality in fact has done some quick-change tricks since Hardy's day, so that what was moral for him and immoral for his readers may have, and in fact has, a totally different aspect and meaning for us.

Which brings us at once to the great defect in Hardy's make-up as a novelist. Living in the heart of an age where morality was the great watchword he may perhaps be excused for not having rumbled morality, for not seeing that morality, as a fixed entity, does not really exist, that it is really nothing but a fashion, which changes from one year to another, from one country to another, from one place to another, and more especially from one person to another, as surely as the fashion and taste in hats or furniture. Morality is virtually a fraud, since there is really no stabilized coinage of morality at all but only the elemental currency of human action and re-action, only human conduct and its consequences. In championing Tess as pure, Hardy was committing, as a novelist, just as

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grave an error as those who condemned her as a wanton. For it is not the novelist's business to champion at all, any more than it is his business to judge. His job is to create and interpret. Shakespeare does not champion *Desdemona*, nor does he give *Othello* the title of *Desdemona: a Pure Woman*, though he might have felt every bit as justified as Hardy in doing so. He creates and interprets, and manages also to do something else for which there is no recipe: he touches us to tears of pity. But for Hardy more creation and interpretation was not enough. He must come boldly out on the side of purity. He took up, in fact, a Moral Attitude. With the inevitable result that we wonder today what all the fuss was about. We are no longer scandalized or outraged by Tess's behaviour, and it is only by some intangible and touching quality of greatness in Tess herself that we are moved to any emotions resembling pity at all.

This peculiar quality in Tess, recognized by many writers but never really explained, brings us up at once against the question of plot. For Tess is the one major character in the whole range of Hardy's varied and often impossible characters who transcends the elaborate architecture of the plots, who is doomed yet who in some strange way escapes and lives on beyond her doom and the pages of the book. "Tess", as Mr E. M. Forster has very well said, "conveys the feeling that she is greater than destiny." This is so true, and Mr Forster then proceeds to discuss the question of Hardy's plots so well that I cannot resist quoting him a second time:

Hardy arranges events with emphasis on causality, the ground plan is a plot, and the characters are ordered to acquiesce to its requirements. . . . His characters are involved in various snares, they are finally bound hand and foot, there is a ceaseless emphasis on fate, and yet for all the sacrifices made to it, we never see the action as a living thing as we see it in *Bernice* or *Antigone* or *The Cherry Orchard*.

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This hits the mark, but I would go even further and say that it is that very emphasis on causality, that ceaseless emphasis on fate, and that constant elaborated building-up of plot and the subordination of everything to it that has made Hardy, in many ways, a second-class writer. When George Moore made his now famous indictment of Hardy as a second-class writer the world was scandalized. Yet it was very true. Technically, in spite of that genius for the creation of atmosphere, Hardy can at times be the biggest bungler with words in the whole history of the novel. The latinized, slow-moving prose reaches its worst depths in such phrases, common on every page, as the "spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light", "a domiciliary intimacy", "equinoctial darkness", "a pulsating flexuous domesticity". Thousands of grandiose wasted words lie along Hardy's path as a novelist. Living in an age that adored elaborations he wrote for it as though he were saying to himself, "I have profound works to write. The longer and more elaborate the words I use the more profound I shall seem to be."

Oddly enough, that overburdened prose now creates the entirely opposite effect, an effect of something pompous and meretricious. Hardy seems far more profound when using the far simpler idioms of poetry. His knotty little poems are in fact his choicest works—the sharp little nuts of his own autumn, tense and bitterly flavoured with the refined salt of his irony. As a novelist, however, he suffers much from having to carry the burden of precisely those characteristics by which he was once judged to be great. His plots and his prose have revenged themselves upon him completely.

Not so with Conrad. In the first place Conrad set no emphasis on plot. Character and atmosphere to Conrad were everything, plot nothing. Secondly, though he is

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a verbose writer and sometimes a trying writer, his verbosity is on another plane from Hardy's, a higher and rarer plane altogether. It is a new and gorgeous verbosity. It is the sublime verbosity of the poet, where Hardy's is only the verbosity of the long-winded local preacher out to impress his hearers by mere length and weight of words, regardless of whether they understand them or not. Hardy did his best to impress us by a philosophically weighted style that now seems, at its worst, about as alive as a stuffed elephant, but Conrad set out to impress us, and did impress us, by words that were like paint, by a style that was daubed on the page with prodigious liberality, in gorgeous and sombre overtones, the sort of style which in fact had never been seen in English literature before and has never been seen since.

It was in fact the style of a foreigner. Conrad, for all his command of English, could not escape his blood. The English are constantly being taunted for their fear of showing their emotions, but Conrad never qualified for that gibe. His novels are as supercharged with emotion as the Victorian age was supercharged with its sense of right and wrong—a sense which, as it happens, never troubled Conrad the novelist very much. Not for Conrad the vexed question of the purity or impurity of heroines. It was enough for him that women were flesh and blood—a fact that happened also to have been good enough for Shakespeare and Defoe. Who ever troubled about the purity of Moll Flanders or Cleopatra? Certainly not their creators. In their day the milk of virginity was worth little or nothing; by Hardy's day it was at a premium; but by Conrad's day the price was slumping again.

It must be remembered that although only seventeen years separate the births of Hardy and Conrad, Hardy had

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almost finished writing when Conrad began. *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad's first book, and *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy's last, were both published in 1895. And between that date and the date of *Desperate Remedies*, twenty-five years earlier, many things had happened to change not only the social and moral fabric of life but the whole fabric of the novel too. Among other things Samuel Butler had delivered his two-handed solar-plexus punch called *The Way of All Flesh*, a punch that knocked more wind out of the moralists and more wind into the literature of its time than any other book had done for ages. After Butler things had to be different. And somehow morality never got its wind back, and by an odd coincidence the novel was never quite so windy again.

Not that I would connect Butler with Conrad. But Butler marks a new era, and it was an era in which Conrad happens to be a singular and even a great light. *Jude* is the end of a phase; *Almayer* the beginning of one. With these books the novel became less discursive and more pictorial; it placed less importance on moral issues and more on the elemental clash of human conflict regardless of moral right or wrong; it became more closely allied with painting and farther and farther away from architecture. In short, a thing of altogether brighter colouring, more graceful lines and of infinitely higher temperature.

And with Conrad it reached also new phases in emotional development. With Conrad we are done with the cart-horse. We are concerned instead with a creature of pulsating blood and high emotional spirit. Verbose though Conrad is, his prose moves at great pace, at an almost explosive pressure that is at its best sublime and poetic in its intensity. Words take on fresh rhythms and a grandeur of colour and odour that is intoxicating. Light and darkness and sunlight and sea and the brooding air of

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tropical forests are used with magnificent dexterity to heighten and enrich and throw their light on character.

For we have done with more than the cart-horse. We have done with the old emphasis on plot and on causality. Character and atmosphere have become supreme in importance. The Hardy-esque trick-drama of coincidence dovetailing into coincidence has been replaced by the natural and freer and more noble drama of man against the elements. The dice is still loaded, but not unfairly loaded. And if the emphasis is still inclined to be on fate, it is a fate controlled by something higher and finer than the marionette wires that Hardy pulled but pretended not to pull.

So one could go on analysing and analysing. But when the dissecting and analysis are finished, what is the true test of a novel? It seems to me that the great test is the test of remembrance; in other words, the test of time. The novel whose scenes and meanings fade into insignificance can hardly be reckoned great. *Wuthering Heights*, analysed and judged by technical standards, is a bad novel; but it persists vividly in the mind as a great experience. Dickens, says Mr E. M. Forster again, ought to be bad, but somehow he is good. Micawber and company are as flat as pancakes, but in spite of that they persist with us. Defoe is among the greatest of novelists because of an eternally unfading quality of his scenes and people. Who ever forgets Robinson Crusoe?

And what is it we remember of Conrad and Hardy? Is it, with Hardy, the elaborate architecture of the plots, the heavy philosophy which he must have thought an indispensable part of a serious novel, the laborious working-out of the problems? Not at all. Somehow they have faded, and what we remember instead are those scenes in which Hardy cut the cackle and came to the horses: the

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terrific scene of the pig-sticking in *Jude the Obscure*, the harrowing pictures of Tess half-frozen in the turnip-field, the auction of the wife in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and so on. Judged by these Hardy is great. But there are few, far too few such scenes to compare with them. Whereas in Conrad, since the main emphasis is on the pictorial, whole books, not merely scenes, rise up in vivid remembrance. I find it difficult to remember the exact plots of *Lord Jim* or *Almayer*, but I see the whole panorama of the tropics and recapture the tense existence of the characters spontaneously. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is the record of a man and a voyage, and though I have not read the book for almost ten years, its scenes and portraits rise up before me with the clarity and brilliance of fresh-daubed paint. In Hardy we read a prodigious number of dead words before encountering a living scene. With Conrad the books themselves are living scenes.

It is, in fact, Conrad who survives the test. It is very ennobling, no doubt, to be a novelist with a mission, to feel that since there are wrongs to set right it is your duty to set them right, to champion the purity of young ladies against the revilings of an age with whom you do not see eye to eye on questions of illegitimacy, to set great moral problems and solve them, to be the novelistic voice crying in the wilderness. The only thing is that, ennobling though it may be, the work of such writers rarely seems to survive. The great causes of one age have an unhappy knack of becoming rather silly in the next. All honour to the novelist who lashes his age, but he must not mind if to the age that comes after him he seems to be beating a dead donkey. Dickens is almost the sole surviving novelist with a purpose, and he survives not because of his purposes but in spite of them. So it is with the novelist

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who shocks the world in his own day; what shocked his contemporaries often seems as mild as milk to posterity.

There are, in short, writers who date and writers who remain as fresh as daisies. And for that very good reason I have no hesitation in putting my money on Conrad. Hardy already dates, but Conrad, neither prophet nor moralist, neither propagandist nor champion of causes, triumphs as fresh as ever. And if I do not call him immortal it is not because I have any doubts about Conrad, but simply because I have my doubts about immortality.

PETER QUENNELL

D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley

D. H. LAWRENCE AND ALDOUS HUXLEY

By Peter Quennell

IT was an odd chance that, a few years before his death, I brought D. H. Lawrence into close personal contact with Aldous Huxley. Two novelists have seldom been more unlike. Self-taught proletarian confronted the scion of a distinguished middle-class family; enthusiast encountered sceptic, believer the wistful unbeliever, who if he reached any kind of faith would ascend to it through the stony defiles of the intelligence. Lawrence was a writer of genius, but muddle-headed; Huxley, supremely intelligent, appears to suffer, now and then, from the very complexity of his mental apparatus and from the facility with which he puts his reasoning powers to work. This one point, however, they have in common. Both are influential writers; and, while both have made an influential contribution to the development of the modern novel, they have influenced its spirit rather than its shape. Each has expressed the view that questions of form are relatively unimportant. To D. H. Lawrence, at least, all talk of literary aesthetics was anathema; and there is a story of his in which a misguided contemporary novelist—the type of bloodless, boweless prig, to whom Lawrence recurred so savagely again and again—is held up to ridicule because he is overheard dictating an article that contains the suggestion that what the modern novel lacks

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is architectural design. "Good God!" ejaculates the heroine mentally. "Architecture! He might just as well say: What the modern novel lacks is whalebone, or a teaspoon, or a tooth stopped." Nor were Lawrence's contemptuous protests confined to his novels and short stories. They overflow into his correspondence. "They want me to have form", he grumbles in a missive quoted by Mr Huxley in his brilliant and sympathetic foreword to the collected edition of Lawrence's letters. "That means, they want me to have *their* pernicious, ossiferous, skin-and-grief form, and I won't."

To Aldous Huxley's distrust and dislike of form I shall return in a later paragraph. If Lawrence ridiculed these considerations, it was because—above everything else—he valued spontaneity and could only write under the impetus of passionate feeling.

Art, he thought, should flower from an immediate impulse towards self-expression or communication, and should wither with the passing of the impulse. Of all building materials [Mr Huxley tells us] Lawrence liked adobe the best; its extreme plasticity and extreme impermanence endeared it to him. . . . Great buildings made him feel uncomfortable. . . . He felt something of the same discomfort in the presence of any highly finished work of art.

From his own point of view, he was perhaps right. Discipline might have clarified, but it might also have hampered and curtailed the expansion of his extraordinary gift; and no amount of discipline could have supplied the loss of that exquisite verbal sensitiveness—the command of language that, even in his latest and worst books, never quite deserted him. At second hand, it must be admitted—and Lawrence has had many imitators—his tricks and mannerisms prove intolerably dull. The books that Lawrence himself produced at the end of his career are definitely bad books, lit up here and there by wonderful

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poetic flashes; yet they serve a purpose, since they—like the products of his imitators—help us to distinguish the good in Lawrence's achievement from the bad, its essentials from the mass of surrounding irrelevancies.

His gift for literature was, incidentally, his gift for life. No man so perverse as D. H. Lawrence, no novelist often so disappointing, no "thinker" so prejudiced and so wrong-headed. . . . Yet it is difficult to read his novels, stories, letters and not come to the conclusion that we are in touch with a man who, though he could be foolish, childish, mulish, had a "greatness" that overshadows every fault. "Lawrence's opinions," writes Mr David Garnett, during the course of his vivid biographical introduction to *Love Among the Haystacks*, "what he called his philosophy, never affected me, but his *values*, his instinctive code of ethics, always seemed to me incontrovertible." Similarly, although his readers may dissent from, or perhaps actively resent, every view that the theorist puts forward, they succumb, nevertheless, to the writer's spell. For Lawrence's dogma was only a very small part of his literary equipment. He had vitality and, coupled with this vitality, a spiritual integrity that insisted that, wherever he went, whatever he did, he must continue to make his own terms—that, through everything, unashamedly, he must be himself. . . .

Sooner or later, the discussion of D. H. Lawrence's literary influence strays into a discussion of his personality. The details of his literary career are not very significant. Two early novels, *The White Peacock* and *The Trespasser*, both promising and both somewhat incomplete, were followed by *Sons and Lovers*, the autobiographical volume in which he approached one of the determining factors of his private life, his love for his mother, the devoted, determined, "superior" woman who had made him what he

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was. . . . *Sons and Lovers* was published in 1913. A year later, the outbreak of war, and, two years later, the suppression of his fourth novel, *The Rainbow*, administered a jolt from which his spiritual equilibrium never quite recovered. His books became more and more chaotic. Still they contained unforgettable passages; but gradually obsessions and fixed ideas—literary *tics* and manias of every kind—began to invade his prose style; and, finally, we reach *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a novel that may be good propaganda but is certainly not good literature, since from observing individuals Lawrence has descended to attacking types; while a note of fury and frustration deforms his narrative.

The Man Who Died is Lawrence's swan-song—calm, lovely, painful as one of those *Pietas* in which Christ's body lies stretched across His mother's knees and passion has subsided into physical exhaustion. "I'm rather miserable", records the penultimate letter, printed in Mr Huxley's volume. "I'm miserable" insists the very last; and an atmosphere of profound and haunting sadness seems to hang heavily over Lawrence's closing years, as he realized that the struggle was coming to an end. For Lawrence had loved, while he hated, life. He had loved, though he hated, abused and spurned, his fellow human beings. Throughout his career, his greatest ambition was to form a society—an entirely new society—that should constitute a living nucleus in the dissolution of the old; and his chief disappointment was his repeated failure.

What ails me [he once wrote to a psychologist] is the absolute frustration of my primeval societal instinct. . . . I think societal instinct much deeper than sex instinct—and societal repression much more devastating. There is no repression of the sexual individual comparable to the repression of the societal man in me. . . . Myself, I suffer badly from being so cut off. . . .

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And, however pompously conveyed, there is no doubt that this diagnosis of his spiritual ailments includes a considerable degree of psychological truth.

For, paradoxically enough, Lawrence's contribution to modern literature may be summed up in the fact that he gave literature—as distinct from the art of living, in which, towards the end of his life, he knew that he had failed—a second place. Had he succeeded in life, it is probable that his literary work might have been more harmonious; but, having failed, he enriched literature by refusing to recognize that it was the main object, the natural termination, of a writer's existence. "I will live my life", he wrote, "and, if possible, be happy. . . ." It was not possible; and, casually, he continued to throw off tales, novels and essays that preserve an aesthetic value, even though the "message" that they attempt to enforce seems wrong-headed and absurd. Take, for instance, the long story entitled *St. Mawr*. Considered from one aspect, this account of the vicissitudes of a tiresome middle-class girl, out of patience with her husband and his immediate surroundings, and chimerically enamoured of a vicious horse, is the very height of perversity and affectation. But then the scene changes to New Mexico. Lawrence is writing of the mountain ranch in which he himself spent some time after the war; and every sentence almost has a felicity, vividness and suggestive power that few modern prose writers can claim to have equalled:

From her doorway, from her porch, she could watch the vast eagle-like wheelings of the daylight, that turned as the eagles which lived in the near rocks turned overhead in the blue, turning their luminous, dark-edged-patterned bellies and underwings upon the pure air, like winged orbs. So the daylight made the vast turn upon the desert, brushing the farthest outwatching mountains. And sometimes, the vast strand of the desert would float with curious undulations and exhalations amid the blue fragility of mountains, whose upper edges

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were harder than their floating bases. And sometimes she would see the little brown adobe houses of the village Mexicans, twenty miles away, like little cube crystals of insect houses dotting upon the desert, very distinct, with a cotton-wood tree or two rising near. . . . And beyond everything, the mountains like icebergs showing up from an outer sea. Then later, the sun would go down blazing above the shallow cauldron of simmering darkness, and the round mountain of Colorado would lump up into uncanny significance, northwards. . . . Ah! it was beauty, beauty absolute, at any hour of the day: whether the perfect clarity of morning, or the mountains beyond the simmering desert at noon, or the purple lumping of northern mounds under a red sun at night. Or whether the dust whirled in tall columns, travelling across the desert far away . . . tall, leaning pillars of dust hastening with ghostly haste: or whether, in the early part of the year, suddenly in the morning a whole sea of solid white would rise rolling below . . . or whether the black rain and cloud streaked down, far across the desert, and lightning stung down with sharp white stings on the horizon: or the cloud travelled and burst overhead, with rivers of fluid blue fire running out of heaven and exploding on earth, and hail coming down like a world of ice shattered above: or the hot sun rode in again: or the snow fell in heavy silence: or the world was blinding white under a blue sky, and one must hurry under the pine trees for shelter against that vast, white, back-beating light which rushed up at one and made one almost unconscious, amid the snow.

Any of D. H. Lawrence's later novels is a lesson in how a work of literature should not be composed; yet they contain passages of which every line is an indication of the beauties that may still be extracted from the vocabulary of modern English. Isolated sentences catch the eye—a single epithet: “the cold *cornelian* talons of the bear”: the hawks on the fence, “motionless, like dark *fists* clenched under heaven”: the “wood-pecker . . . fearless like a *warrior in war-paint*”; and through whole long paragraphs, as through the quotation transcribed above, runs a sense of that daemonic quality, that “otherness” which “lies beyond the boundaries of man's conscious mind” and which Lawrence, according to Mr Huxley, “could never forget. . . .”

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So far Mr Huxley's exposition. He admired Lawrence—probably more than he has admired any other living writer—but his destiny and that of Lawrence could not hope to converge. Huxley, too, distrusts form in the modern novel; but, whereas Lawrence abhorred classicism because he feared it might hamper the natural and spontaneous expression of his emotions, Huxley seems to fear for the play of his intelligence:

... I have a taste [he has written] for the lively, the mixed and the incomplete in art, preferring it to the universal and the chemically pure. ... I regard the classical discipline, with its insistence on elimination, concentration, simplification, as being, for all the formal difficulties it imposes on a writer, essentially an escape from, a getting out of, the greatest difficulty—which is to render adequately, in terms of literature, that infinitely complex and mysterious thing, actual reality.

Elsewhere, he reverts to his personal method. After referring to Flaubert and to the fact that "there is nothing in all Flaubert's writings that remotely resembles a vulgarity", he adds that—

The temptations which Flaubert put aside are, by any man of lively fancy and active intellect, incredibly difficult to be resisted. An image presents itself, glittering, iridescent; capture it, pin it down, however irrelevantly too brilliant for its context. A phrase, a situation suggests a whole train of striking or amusing ideas that fly off at a tangent, so to speak, from the round world on which the creator is at work; what an opportunity for saying something witty or profound! True, the ornament will be in the nature of a florid excrescence on the total work; but never mind. In goes the tangent—or rather, out into artistic irrelevancy. ... For a self-conscious artist, there is a most extraordinary pleasure in knowing exactly what the results of showing off must be and then (in spite of this knowledge, or because of it) proceeding, deliberately and with all the skill at his command, to commit precisely those vulgarities, against which his conscience warns him. ... To the aristocratic pleasure of displeasing other people, the conscious offender against good taste can add the still more aristocratic pleasure of displeasing himself.

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Now, besides being "a man of lively fancy and active intellect", Mr Huxley is essentially a "self-conscious artist"; and in the above passage we have the neatest and, incidentally, the most damaging criticism of Mr Huxley's narrative method that I have yet seen. For it is just that inability to resist temptation which makes Mr Huxley's novels so stimulating yet, as soon as we have digested them, so curiously unsatisfying. As we read Mr Huxley for the first time, we are struck by the acuteness of his observations, impressed by the facility of his generalizations—by his knack of discovering an unexpected and witty analogy between two apparently quite unrelated aspects of life and art. But then a sort of weariness possesses our minds. . . . He is so blankly reasonable, so right. It is as if he had introduced us into a large well-furnished library, embellished with photographic reproductions of all the best pictures, stocked with copies of all the latest publications, had switched on a brilliant unshaded lamp, hurried us round the apartment, snatching down a learned volume here and there—and had left us, rather abruptly, on the threshold, interested yet a little out of breath. What next? But to this question Mr Huxley does not pretend to propose an answer. The mind is its own place—neat, aseptic, somewhat comfortless. And, beyond the territories illuminated by an active academic intelligence, there is only limbo—the obscurity of pain, disease and death, and the dim half-fabulous regions—the imaginary Land of Cockayne—where we *might* enjoy ourselves, did the altitude of our brows, and the general bulkiness of our intellectual equipment, not make it extremely difficult to pass its gate.

For even more poignant than Mr Huxley's pessimism is the visionary paganism that has inspired him to some of his most nostalgic flights:

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The earthly paradise, the earthly paradise! [he writes, in a section of his anthology, *Texts and Pretexts*, that deals with the simpler pleasures of the senses]. With what longing, between the bars of my temperament, do I peer at its bright landscape, how voluptuously sniff at its perfumes of hay and raspberries, of honeysuckle and roast duck, of sun-warmed flesh and nectarines and the sea! But the bars are solid; the earthly paradise is always on the further side. Self-hindered, I cannot enter and make myself at home.

Contrast this attitude with that of Lawrence. No bars severed Lawrence from the world he loved. At least, he was conscious of none; and, if the bars existed, they were supplied not by Lawrence's own temperament but by the intractability, as he saw it, of the modern universe. He accepted or rejected; but we cannot imagine him peeping over the hedge, or through the bars, at a warm sensuous life, part actual, part imaginary, that he envied but knew that he could never share.

Here is all the difference between the dilettante and the devotee. Mr Huxley is inquisitive about the senses; he likes to touch the strings of passion and listen to the plangent note that he produces slowly dying away; while for Lawrence passion, and the experience of passion, was a profound emotional reality, inseparable from the other experiences of his spiritual life. Lawrence's characters may consist of a jangling assemblage of emotional atoms, over-coloured, over-drawn; but Mr Huxley's characters are built up of hard outlines. And the reader can take his choice between the novelist who prefers to regard human beings as a mass of palpitating viscera, and the novelist who supplies an outline, then proceeds to attach a number of amusing and scandalous details, connected somewhat after the manner of those balloons which early caricaturists depicted floating round their victims in mid-air.

Crome Yellow showed this method at its most accom-

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plished. Since then, Mr Huxley has done his best to extend the scope of his novels; but, lacking the ability to create character, he has been obliged to introduce the same *dramatis personae* time after time. The same introspective young man peers through the bars of his temperament, perpetually deploring his ability to roll in the hay among the nymphs and satyrs. There are the same hostesses and harridans, the same *femme fatale*, a relic of the roaring 'twenties, who attracts, tantalizes and tortures the young man. *Antic Hay*, *These Barren Leaves*, *Point Counterpoint* can scarcely be regarded as a succession of novels; for they are essentially variations on the same theme. And, as with every great virtuoso, in Mr Huxley's work it is not the theme that counts so much as the pyrotechnic skill—the really astonishing verbal gusto—that he manages to put into every detail of his rendering.

Yes, it is easy to jeer at Mr Huxley. With a kind of mournful pride, he has demonstrated that he can do it better than we can ourselves; and an awareness of his shortcomings seems to be present in all that he writes. He is the first victim of a hypersensitive critical intelligence; and from that faculty of self-criticism springs a peculiar intellectual honesty that almost consoles us for the absence of subtler tones. Thus, he has influenced even novelists who profess to despise him. Not the texture of their prose, it is true: Mr Huxley's prose, unlike Lawrence's, is seldom so rich that we turn back to re-read a single paragraph or chapter, or to hunt up an epithet that has stuck in the memory. . . . Mr Huxley has influenced the novelist's attitude. His inquisitiveness is catching. The agility of mind has prompted more lethargic writers to shake off that contented somnolence into which English fiction has always been prone to descend, and to look about

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them with a fresh and searching eye; a whole generation of spirited performers is in his debt. What course Mr Huxley's destiny will now assume is one of the most interesting literary problems of the present decade.

E. B. C. JONES

E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf

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By E. B. C. Jones

IN Forster the method of the mid-nineteenth-century novelist is still in full swing. There have been occasions when he has startled us: in the brevity with which Bast's death is recorded in *Howards End* and in *The Longest Journey* where a chapter begins: "Gerald died that afternoon. He was broken up in the football match." But such abruptness is a mere matter of concentration; Forster, so fluent about mental crises, becomes terse over physical. But this idiosyncrasy in no way interferes with the orderly unfolding of the story, or the exposition of character in the traditional way. Reading one of his novels is very much like reading *The Mill on the Floss* or a Harriet Martineau; the relation between writer and reader is that between guide and traveller: the latter is led on from scene to scene, enlightened and entertained by passages of reflection, analysis or philosophy at appropriate moments—appropriate according to the logic of everyday life. This is true even of *A Passage to India*, the most complex as well as the latest of the novels, and the one in which the writer's non-materialistic outlook finds largest expression. Mysteries there are—the book's theme is that almost nothing can be certainly known and very little indeed communicated—but these mysteries belong to the subject-matter, not to the method employed. When the reader

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is left in doubt whether it was a man or a hallucination which assailed Miss Quested in the Marabar Caves, it is not because clues and connexions have been suppressed, but because Forster thus embodies his conviction that existence is mysterious. He tells us lucidly, in due order, everything relevant to these matters; one can re-read a dozen times and be no nearer to a solution; just as although Emily Brontë tells us everything relevant about Cathy and Heathcliff, the relation of human love to the rest of the universe remains unknown. The obscurity is in neither case of the author's making, but inherent in his material.

The mid-nineteenth-century method, the continuous orderly unfolding of story and character, is also employed by Virginia Woolf in her first two books, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919). They are long leisurely investigations into the effects of people on each other, with elaborate backgrounds and carefully drawn minor characters. The theme of *Night and Day* is the contrast between the individual's relation to the world and his relation to solitude; but, strong though the forces of night and introversion are, daylight and the world demand Katherine's allegiance in the end. With Katherine's later prototype, Rhoda of *The Waves*, victory was to go the other way. In *The Voyage Out*, passion has no rival; it is death which brings youthful love to an untimely end. Here, too, stability reigns; the continuous method still imposes itself.

This fact is particularly worth noting because in 1915 the break-up of narrative had already begun. In that year was published *Pointed Roofs*, the first volume of Dorothy Richardson's long and, in 1936, still incomplete novel, which plunged the reader into what has since been termed the stream-of-consciousness method. Virginia

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Woolf's third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922), without employing this method, presents another aspect of the break-up of narrative. Compared with *Night and Day*, its form is revolutionary. Already the sense of flux and transiency, of which later she gained such mastery, is powerfully at work, expressing itself in discontinuity of narrative. Gone is the guide-traveller relation between author and reader; the author is no longer a calm observer, commenting, explaining, bridging gaps. She has become a sort of super-jackdaw who deposits in the reader's lap bright fragments of description, summaries, catalogues, tiny morsels of dialogue, brief flashes of characterization, hints and hieroglyphs; and the order in which these are presented is not dictated by any logic with which we are familiar but by some inner requirement of the author's. To piece these fragments together the reader must be on the alert. True, the story progresses from Jacob's early childhood to his death in the war, but that is saying very little: an album of snapshots may be chronologically arranged without giving a stranger a coherent idea of a decade of family life. Here is Jacob in a boat, in Cambridge, in Greece, at a party; here is his room; but the connexions, the bridges, many of the outstanding clues are missing. Reading *Jacob's Room* is not in the least like reading a George Eliot or a Harriet Martineau.

Nor, on this its first trial, is the method artistically successful. The perceptions are wide in range and brilliant, but the morsels do not coalesce into a unity. There is also a very refined sort of sentimentality running through it. Jacob is not individualized; he is the impression he makes on others, he is a conduit of the author's feelings, he is a series of moods, he is any clever, sensitive young man. In thus absolving herself from the need to imagine Jacob whole, particular, with a core of unmis-

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takeable self, Virginia Woolf has left herself free for a general emotion towards him. It is this general emotion which gives the book a slightly sentimental tone. There is the same tone in *Mrs Dalloway*, but due partly to a different cause.

A change of method of course entails a modification of style. Hers has always had a highly individual precision. In *Jacob's Room* the firm lightness of stroke is the same as before, but the rhythm is more staccato:

The bareness of Mrs Pearce's front room was fully displayed at ten o'clock at night when a powerful oil-lamp stood on the middle of the table. The harsh light fell on the garden; out straight across the lawn; lit up a child's bucket and a purple aster and reached the hedge. Mrs Flanders had left her sewing on the table. There were her large reels of white cotton and her steel spectacles; her needle-case; her brown wool wound round an old postcard. There were the bulrushes and the *Strand* magazines; and the linoleum sandy from the boys' boots. A daddy-longlegs shot from corner to corner and hit the lamp globe. The wind blew straight dashes of rain across the window, which flashed silver as they passed through the light. A single leaf tapped hurriedly, persistently, upon the glass. There was a hurricane out at sea.

A minor circumstance of Virginia Woolf's desertion of the Thackerayan tradition was her relinquishment of comedy. Wit there always was and is: Mrs Hilbery who was "beautifully adapted for life on another planet" is an early example of many sparks of it; but humour, in Forster so well and inextricably interwoven with all the other strands, is weak in her. Towards the end of *Night and Day* she seems to be revenging herself on characters of whom she has grown tired by bundling them into ridiculous situations. Of this clumsiness there is later not a single trace. Scenes of comedy cannot occur where there are no scenes, but only impressions dissolving into each other, apparently disconnected from each other. For

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now all is fluid; and this fluidity is as it were given concrete form by the introduction into *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) of a secondary story which has no connexion with the main story. That this secondary story concerns Septimus, who is insane, emphasizes the effect of fluidity, of flux, of dissolution. In the same way, the world pictured in *The Waves* would have been untrue to its creator's vision had it not included the remote, unhappy, isolated and finally suicidal Rhoda.

Want of due detachment from his characters is one of the major pitfalls of a novelist. The heroine of *Mrs Dalloway* (who has nothing in common with her namesake in *The Voyage Out* but delicacy of physique) is portrayed by means of the stream-of-consciousness method; so is Septimus; the author does not comment on them. Yet there arises in the reader, as regards Mrs Dalloway, a slight uneasiness. This exquisite, wise, adored, virginal creature—is there not something of the day-dream, of wish-fulfilment about her? It is this which prevents the book, fascinating and at times moving though it is, from being such a good novel as its successors, or as *The Voyage Out*.

In *To the Lighthouse* (1927) Virginia Woolf achieves the necessary detachment from her persons, and contrives with astonishing skill to make at least two of them solid and particular in the old way, without even momentarily impeding the sense of flux. This is done by a feat of concentration; in two pages the intimate psychological relation between Mr and Mrs Ramsay is exposed to the depths. He pauses in his pacing and reciting long enough to demand tacitly, and for her to supply, the reassurance, support, vitality, without which he cannot live. This brief passage, unerringly placed as it is, modifying and modified by Mrs Ramsay's thoughts, and Lily's, and

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James's, brings the Ramsay parents to life without over-weighting the human element. Even the good, the strong, the beautiful—even Mrs Ramsay—are straws tossed in the inexorable stream of time. This perfect combination of the solid and the fluid is what makes *To the Lighthouse* such a remarkable book, less perfect than *The Waves* but not less moving. It is in no sense a study for the later book. Virginia Woolf's work contains some studies: Mr Ridley of *The Voyage Out* resembles Mr Ramsay, even to pacing and reciting poetry aloud; Mrs Ridley and Mrs Ramsay are both large, benign, competent, beautiful women of compelling personality. Rhoda and Susan of *The Waves* respectively resemble Katherine and Mary of *Night and Day*. But in a larger sense, the diversity of her material and—more important—of conception, is admirable. You never can tell what sort of novel Virginia Woolf will write next.

Nevertheless, there is in *To the Lighthouse* a clue to what is to come—a passage bearing the germ of her latest book. Lily Briscoe is musing:

And, what was even more exciting, she felt, too, as she saw Mr Ramsay bearing down and repeating, and Mrs Ramsay sitting with James in the window and the cloud moving and the tree bending, how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach.

Here, Lily's sense of proportion is seen in the act of being modified; here, the shifting of emphasis from the individual to the whole wave of existence is noted, not for the first time. Already, in *Night and Day*, Mary had had a similar moment of perception:

Her vision seemed to lay out the lines of her life until death in a way which satisfied her sense of harmony. It only needed persistent effort of thought, stimulated in this strange way by the crowd and the noises,

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to climb the crest of existence and see it all laid out once and for ever. Already her suffering as an individual was left behind her. Of this process, which was to her so full of effort, which comprised infinitely swift passages of thought, leading from one crest to another, as she shaped her conception of life in this world, only two articulate words escaped her, muttered beneath her breath—"Not happiness—not happiness".

It is unwise as well as unfair to hold writers to sentiments or philosophies expressed in their earlier works, but this is too apposite to be ignored. In *The Waves* (1931) individuality plays a very minor rôle. The three men and three women whose streams of consciousness it presents are cyphers; each is but one or at most two facets of a human being. Yet far from being simpler than its forerunners, *The Waves* is richer, more complex, and correspondingly difficult. The six persons are ripples or arabesques of foam upon the wave of existence. They believe that they are living their lives, but it gives a truer idea of the book to say that life is living itself through them. The sense of continuity has returned, but it bears no resemblance to the old. Even in *To the Lighthouse* the writer's new way of treating her material was inimical to form. The old form was discarded because its use would have entailed a false shaping of events; but in *To the Lighthouse*, good though it is, the perfectly appropriate shape has not been found; it is a superb lop-sided book. Lily's intermittent stream of consciousness, which links the first and third parts together, is not a strong enough thread to bind the whole. But *The Waves* unrolls in one unbroken skein, with a majestic inevitability. This is partly due to the subjugation of human individuality already mentioned, partly to the consistency with which the author remains at one level of approach to her material. By means of this maintenance of level, the reader is kept bemused and immersed in an element of dream-like per-

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ceptiveness; but without one taint of day-dreaminess to reduce the life-enhancement which is the function of art. The only interruptions are the short, insufficiently differentiated sea- and land-scapes which divide the parts; these are graceful, and indicate that a day, a lifetime, a cycle, is passing; but they could, and even perhaps should, be ignored.

It is irrelevant to the design of *The Waves* whether or not the reader feels with or about the characters. At moments the pleasure, inseparable from a novel in the old tradition, of identifying oneself with one or more of them, does occur: Rhoda at boarding-school watching Jinny and Susan to see what her reaction to things should be, because she has no spontaneous reactions of her own must wake many a sympathetic echo. But it is not for such moments that we listen to the self-communings of the characters: it is in order that we should divine, with their creator, the nature of the wave in which they are "borne up and thrown down". The emphasis has shifted from individual characters to something else—to, if you like, the writer's "message", though it is a message which cannot be summarized nor separated from the vessel which contains it. Rhoda, the extreme introvert, bewildered except in solitude; Bernard, the extreme extravert, uneasy except in company or when he can crystallize his experience in phrases; Louis, tortured by feeling socially inferior; Jinny, the amateur hetaira—these, filled out and developed, might have become important as individuals here, their business is to be essences. It is not that they are simplified: their total effect is not simple. They have complicated thoughts, subtle emotions, obscure impulses: they are highly articulate—the design of the book requires them to be that. But not one of them is rounded into a dominant individual; not one shares with Mary Datchet

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and Lily Briscoe a vision of existence as a pattern laid out, a wave "curled and whole". What was explicit through a character in earlier novels is here implicit in the book as a whole.

There is one resemblance to be noted between Virginia Woolf and Forster, besides sentimentality which, idealistic and incidental in him, is refined and pervasive in her, and this is the impression made by their novels of half-heartedness about sexual love. *A Room with a View*, alone of Forster's novels, is pure love-story; its heroine Lucy shares with Rachel of *The Voyage Out* a retarded development due to a sheltered life, and—not an inevitable result—a marked unwillingness to recognize that what she feels is love. Nor is this delicacy confined to women. Hewer courts Rachel for many weeks without so much as touching her hand; and it is not until her fatal illness plunges him in misery (most movingly described) that the reader really believes in their love. Katherine of *Night and Day* is avowedly aloof from everyday life, and, recoiling from the passion she divines in Ralph, contracts a sedate engagement with the chilly William. Mrs Dalloway's virginalness has already been mentioned. *To the Lighthouse*, although it covers four years of the life of a large family and their friends, and includes a betrothal, is in effect completely sexless. In *The Waves* the romantic feeling for the attractive philistine Percival shared by several of the main characters is given more prominence than their shadowy affairs with each other.

With Forster, the matter is more complicated, for he makes it quite clear that he is aware of the important part played by sexual love in human existence, and in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) he almost persuades us that he also feels it to be important. But later, even in *The Longest Journey* (1907), which is the history of a marriage,

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the whole result is to exalt comradeship at the expense of sex. There are in *Howards End* (1910) passages in praise of love, but theory is not supported by practice. The incident, absolutely vital to the plot, of Helen's single act of union with Leonard, instead of being directly narrated as are all the other important incidents, is told retrospectively by her in conversation with her sister; and this, instead of making it more convincing, produces a feeling of evasion; so that not only is the reader unable to believe that thus it occurred but he doubts whether Forster himself believes it. The tone of authority with which it is his marked ability to invest all that he has to tell us is denied to this event. Then, too, a deprecatory tone is imparted to Margaret's thoughts when she recalls her girlish impulses towards love as "mere yearnings for the masculine, to be dismissed for what they were worth, with a smile". Here, in the use of "mere", and in the smile, becomes explicit an attitude not officially sanctioned by the author, but underlying all the novels. Perhaps the clue to it lies in George's remark in *A Room with a View* (1908), "that youth and love matter intellectually". But in youth, at all events, love matters in quite another way. Thus, the reader is alienated from Adela in *A Passage to India* (1924) less by the gaucherie and bleakness with which she is endowed than by the fact that, while engaged to Ronnie, she waits till half-way through the book before wondering whether she is in love with him, and then the answer is No. An author has a perfect right to make a character frigid, but the reader should feel confident that it was deliberate.

Forster's attitude towards sex may be limited to academic recognition of its importance; other loves he conveys with complete success: Gino's for his baby, on which hinges *Where Angels Fear to Tread*; the profound affection

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uniting the sisters in *Howards End*, and Mrs Wilcox's passion for the house which lends that book its name; the affection between George and his father, Lucy and her brother in *A Room with a View*, and between Rickie and Ansell in *The Longest Journey*. Seldom has love without manifest sex been treated with such insidious enthusiasm, such apparently casual ease resulting in powerful effect. The indications, often extremely subtle, are usually embodied in dialogue, which in Forster, except at crises, has great lifelikeness without the diffuseness of talk in real life. At crises, his characters tend to express themselves with a smooth trenchancy more like Forster's own than probability sanctions; but his use of talk for exposing a situation, indicating a mental climate, a moral disposition, a social status, is masterly.

No less characteristic are the interpolations which break up the dialogue, with an elegant colloquialism of style which prevents them sounding pontifical, even when they express the author's own views. Sometimes, of course, they represent the unspoken thoughts of the characters. In either case, these passages contain clues and intimations without which the trend of the story cannot be fully understood. In *The Longest Journey*, for instance, Agnes and Rickie discuss whether he shall accept a schoolmastering job which will enable them to marry at once; she adds as an inducement that it may make possible a journey to Italy. Rickie replies, "Yes. Perhaps there—" and breaks off. Then follows this passage:

Perhaps life would be there. He thought of Renan, who declares that on the Acropolis at Athens beauty and wisdom do exist, really exist, as external powers. He did not aspire to beauty and wisdom, but he prayed to be delivered from the shadow of unreality that had begun to darken the world.

Without this clue, reinforced by Rickie's later admission

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that he has been taking life "at second hand", the nature of his failure, and the intention of his creator, would not be absolutely clear. This conflict between the second-hand reaction to life and the first-hand, between the conventional and the imaginative outlook, plays a part in all the novels, and is the subject of *Howards End*. Just as Rickie is torn between the conventional, success-loving Pembrokes, to whom he is allied through love of Agnes, and the idealistic young philosopher Ansell, with whom his real affinity lies, so Margaret Schlegel stands (not torn, for she has the poise of the psychologically mature) between the opposing factions of the "outer" and the "inner" life. She believes that love can bridge the gap, that she will convert Mr Wilcox from the state of "telegrams and anger" which results in "panic and emptiness" to her and Helen's view of the intimate connexion between public and private morality, and make him realize "that personal relations are the important thing for ever and ever". She fails, and hers and Helen's happiness is only saved from huge shipwreck, because Mr Wilcox is finally too elderly and too much crushed by circumstance to maintain his unyielding front. His compromise with the personal view is superficial, not based on a change of heart. A change is brought about in Caroline and Philip, half-hearted emissaries of convention in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, but only after their adherence to the second-hand view has opened the way for Harriet—an extreme example of the goats—to act, and thus they unwittingly connive at tragedy. In *A Room with a View* the forces of convention are routed; alone of the novels, it has a happy ending.

It must not be assumed that enlightenment dwells, for Forster, necessarily with the intellectual or those who think themselves highly educated: Cecil Vyse is intellectual and cultured, but belongs to the goats; Mrs Failing

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likewise; she is damned because she takes nothing seriously. There is no rule of thumb for distinguishing who lives at first hand. Nor is every important character involved in the conflict. In three of the five novels a significant figure, while symbolic of an unconscious attitude towards life, stands outside the battle. In *The Longest Journey* it is Stephen Wonham, a coarse but intensely genuine youth, whose earlier prototype is Gino; in *Howards End* it is Mrs Wilcox, who tells her angry son "Charles, dear Charles, one doesn't ask plain questions. There aren't such things", and who continues to exert an influence on Margaret and the book after she is dead. These figures constitute a touchstone for the participants in the conflict: their quality is perceived by the sheep, ignored by the goats. In *A Room with a View*, the simplest of the novels, the Emersons, father and son, partake of the nature of these detached figures, although consciously arrayed on the side of the private life and first-hand reactions. The last, largest and most significant of these figures is Mrs Moore, the old lady who, in *A Passage to India*, stands outside or behind any conflict of European with Indian or Mohammedan with Hindoo. She is a symbol of the first-hand response to life; unlike Rickie, no "shadow of unreality darkens" her world. She has no preconceived theories about how she ought to feel or behave, and is unaffected by the notions of others. Straying in a mosque in the evening, soon after her arrival in India, she is reproved by an unknown native, the nervous and therefore aggressive Aziz, and strikes up a friendship with him which is the most enduring relationship in the book. From Fielding, the man who represents the enlightened European attitude towards Indians, she remains aloof, as she remains aloof from the central situation of Aziz's trial for assault on Adela. Unlike Fielding, but like Mrs Wilcox and Stephen Wonham

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of earlier novels, she has no intellectual conception of the conflict or of what the decent attitude is; she lives through her possession of the deeply moral quality of taste, which the intellect is powerless by itself to attain. It is this quality of instinctive taste which makes these figures touchstones and endows them with aesthetic weight. In a lesser writer, they might have been made sentimental by simplification; but Wonham is coarse and a drunkard, Mrs Wilcox is limited and socially a bore, and Mrs Moore is often, from Adela's and Ronnie's point of view, peevish and unsympathetic.

Sentimentality in Forster does not attach to persons, as it attaches in a subtle form to the heroine of *Mrs Dalloway*; it occurs in philosophizing passages, chiefly in *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*. Thus, when he commends those "who have added nothing to her [England's] power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once . . . sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity", a sob becomes embarrassingly audible in his voice. The sentiments may command our sympathy, the tone offends by a too-personal emotion.

There are no such offences in *A Passage to India*. When, for a few moments, and rarely, the narrative is broken, it is in order to make vivid the intense, almost terrifying atmosphere and huge size of India; and this sense of hugeness and of impenetrable queerness impregnates the book as a whole. One of its themes is the extreme difficulty of communication between humans; there is not only a gulf fixed between the conventional Europeans and the Indians (embodied in the wonderful garden-party scene), but also non-comprehension between enlightened Moslem and educated Hindoo; and the friendship between Aziz and Fielding, though founded on affection, fails in the end

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through characteristic misunderstanding. Another of its themes is that salvation can only be found through personal integrity and truth to self, and the effect of this on personal relations. Mrs Moore has this integrity, and yet she has, too, a marked impersonality. This cannot be accidental. There are some truths only approachable by the statement of apparent contradictions, and the nearest brief expression known to me of what Mrs Moore "means" as a character, and of this, the latest development of Forster's constant subject, is the prayer in *Ash Wednesday*: "Teach us to care and not to care, Teach us to sit still".

Woven in with these themes is a third, to which I have referred as Forster's non-materialism. He seems to say: Life is supremely queer; things not explicable in terms of reason happen; the nearest man can get to piercing the mystery is through the imagination. And in India this mystery takes as it were concrete forms, as though the unknown forces were stronger here than elsewhere. The mystery, profound and pervasive, infinitely mingled with triviality, is crystallized in the short final section of the book entitled "Temple", where the celebrations of the birth of Shri Krishna are described, and where Aziz and Fielding inconclusively meet again. A penetrating impression is made that the antithesis of spirit and matter is a false one; to this impression the book largely owes its greatness. In *Howards End* Margaret reflected on the conflict between things as we wish they were and as they are:

Love and Truth—their warfare seems eternal. Perhaps the whole visible world rests on it, and if they were one, life itself, like the spirits when Prospero was reconciled to his brother, might vanish into air, into thin air.

The intuition explicit there is implicit in *A Passage to*

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India. The heat, the immensity, the multifarious existences of the physical world, are admirably rendered; but the name of Mrs Moore, mispronounced on the lips of natives to whom she has become a legend, endures longer than the human relations depicted. Imagination is the most real and powerful thing in Forster's universe.

Though primarily concerned with values, the novels can be read simply for their stories, which are excellent, and for their humour, which is inextricably woven into their texture. Tibby Schlegel and his aunt at cross-purposes about a performance of the Fifth Symphony ("I do in a way remember the passage, Tibby"); the scene at the opera in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*; Miss Bartlett, to whom Botticelli's Venus was a pity because nude; the Brahmin professor Godbole in *A Passage to India*—these are a few examples of many scenes and characters written in the richest vein of English comedy.

L. A. G. STRONG

James Joyce

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By L. A. G. Strong

I

AE, in an introduction to a book published just before his death, confessed to having once told the young Joyce that there was not sufficient chaos in his mind. He was deceived, not only by the neat traditionalism of the early poems, but by the neatness of the man. In relation to the chaos of his material, Joyce is like a tidy-minded park-keeper on a windy October day, assiduously spearing pieces of paper and sweeping leaves into neat little heaps; not always successful, but indefatigable, in his quest for order. His achievement is immense: but we are for the moment more concerned with the conflict that provoked it.

Since both park-keeper and park are Joyce, the magnitude of the conflict is apparent. Joyce is a man of violently original genius with a pedantic regard for tradition. Tradition binds him, he breaks his bonds, and proceeds to tie himself up again. For him it wears many guises, but, as with so many Irish writers, its most obstinate guise has been the Catholic Church. *Ulysses* is a great Catholic novel. Behind it, in direct line, even more inescapably than the *Odyssey* which has given it its form, and the French writers who suggested its technique, stand the Revelation of St. John, the early Fathers, the *Divina Commedia*, and the Inquisition. It is a classic of apostasy, the agonized attempt of the artist to bring all life within his

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scope, aware that the effort is essentially a religious effort, and agonized because, while his genius forces him to accept his own interpretation, he cannot forget the interpretations of others. Over the whole book, as over its predecessor, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, broods the sense of sin, that terrific legacy which the Catholic Church irrevocably leaves her children. "*Introibo ad altare Dei*"—the words introducing the Martello tower are the text for that long June day, the hope of morning, the world's first innocence, the opening of the *Odyssey*, the banner that the day so quickly soils. *Ulysses*, although its chief character is no longer the artist but *l'homme moyen sensuel*, extended to his full capacity from ape to god, is the conflict between religion and experience, on a scale which most religious men are unable or unwilling to face: and the blasphemies which turn the short-sighted against it are the desperate gestures of a man doomed to accept, with his entrails if not with his intellect, certain Last Things. In all the analyses, examinations, glossaries and interpretations of Joyce's masterpiece, this, the central fact, has never been sufficiently stressed. *Ulysses* is a moral work, and Joyce, for all his detachment, a moralist: not a rational moralist like Shaw, but a superstitious moralist: a man with a sense of sin.

To say this is not for an instant to lose sight of his artistry. The staggering thing about *Ulysses* is the art which has controlled it, and the art which has been put into it. But Joyce is a Catholic artist. The Catholic artist is always aware, in theory, that none is better fitted to face and portray life in all its aspects, but he is hindered by the problems of expediency. Joyce, refusing to admit these problems, is uneasy in his mind over the refusal. He cannot but refuse: the originality of his genius gives him

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no choice: but he shares in the remorse, the Agenbite of Inwit, that remains among the ashes of Bloom's and Stephen's day.

II

Joyce's originality is strongly manifest in *Dubliners*. On the surface, there seems today nothing revolutionary about these short stories. Related to their period, they are a portent. They pricked the fabric of the contemporary short story. Once they had become a part of literary consciousness, the art of the short story underwent a change. For all their quietness, their drab tones, they are as violently original as anything written in this century: and they are full of a moral uneasiness. ' *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* narrowed this uneasiness to the sharp, focussed conflict between the artist and religion.' Joyce gives us the terrific sermons in full, but he has not exorcised their influence by writing them out. The sense of sin remains, and Joyce, as artist, is always conscious, not only of the sad shaking of priestly heads, but of the absence of that peace which floods the soul of Stephen Dedalus when he has received absolution.

In view, not only of this, but of its purely literary qualities, it is hardly a paradox to say that *Ulysses* is pre-eminently a traditional novel. It is a compressed history of European civilization, and to present it Joyce uses every literary device which that civilization and its offshoots have produced. The Homeric model, eagerly seized by his imagination, has been refined and elaborated almost to pedantry by the park-keeper side of his mind—the same side which keeps fiddling at and tightening up the cross-correspondences of words and ideas in *Work in Progress*. The model supplies the philosophic background for what, on the surface, is a naturalistic narrative, and bears to this

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narrative a relation similar to that between the characters and those haunting, dominant ideas which they have tried in vain to banish from their minds. Like those ideas, it underlies and influences the action, and the action is incomprehensible without it. Both Stephen and Bloom feel that they have been hit below the belt, and are all the time trying to forget the blows. Stephen's already keen sense of sin is reinforced by remorse for his treatment of his dead mother. Bloom, hurt irremediably by the death of his son, and humiliated by the conduct of his wife, for which he feels partly to blame, hates his own inadequacy, and tries to take refuge in fantasies. The emotional key to the book is the scene after Stephen has been knocked down by the Tommies, and Bloom, bending over this young man who feels that he has no father, sees in his face the vision of his own dead son, as he might have been. And he, Bloom, is to blame. It is man who has soiled the promise of morning. It is man who by his own fault—or woman's: Circe is always with us—has forfeited the bliss of Eden. The "little children" with whom the priest pleaded in *A Portrait of the Artist* have fallen from grace, and must go on falling. This is Joyce's theme.¹

It is, once again, the paradox of the park-keeper and the park; that this coolest, tidiest, most detached of artists should be involved in a perception of the pain and frustration of life greater than that of any contemporary, and should suffer the emotions, not of a pagan or a freethinker, but of a believer whose artistic integrity has compelled him to walk out of his Father's house.

¹ Joyce had as a young man a tenor voice of exceptional quality. It was never trained: he became a writer. May we see in his championship of the tenor O'Sullivan an act of penitence for the buried talent, another Odysseus recognizing his Telemachus?

III

The great technical contribution of *Ulysses* to the art of the novel has been its flexibility and resource in the fitting of speech to character. Joyce's models, like George Moore's, were chiefly French, and he has carried this typically French preoccupation to unprecedented lengths. The meditations, or monologues, of each character are in a language deeply appropriate to him or her. The growth in the womb and the arrival of a new life at the lying-in hospital are celebrated by a parallel growth of the English language from early forms to the speech of the New World. The French symbolists, the French naturalists, and Joyce's other Continental master ("Ibsen and Zola writing of the realities of life in joyless and pallid words"), all contribute to this summary of civilized suffering. Incidentally, it is worthy of notice, in regard to the nocturnal technique of *Work in Progress*, that as Stephen's and Bloom's day progresses, the boundaries between external and internal reality become blurred and interfused, and the language blurs and interfuses with them. *Ulysses* exists upon several planes. It is, of course, an experiment; yet, despite its innovations, it is an experiment in the use of traditional resources. There is more in it of the old than of the new.

It has been left for Joyce to cross right over and essay a work different not only in degree but in kind. With *Work in Progress* he becomes definitely an experimental novelist.

IV

The traditional novelist is one who finds existing methods of expression adequate for what he has to say.

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He may add to the tradition, but what he adds will be a mannerism, a new way of using the accepted tools. He has not needed to forge tools of his own. The experimental novelist, on the other hand, finds the existing tools inadequate. His difficulty resembles the poet's. Language lags behind perception, being merely an agreement to give certain names to things which we see often enough to be able to agree about them. But the poet and the experimental novelist are seeing new things, about which there is no general agreement. The existing language is inadequate to convey their discoveries.

If now [says Goethe] a man of genius gains an insight into the secret operations of Nature, the language which has been handed down to him is inadequate to express anything so remote from ordinary affairs. He ought to have at his command the language of spirits to express truly his peculiar perceptions.

The language of spirits being inaccessible, poet and novelist have to do what they can; not only with language, but with the actual approach to the thoughts they are trying to convey.

Experiments in the novel go therefore by way of language and structure. By structure I do not so much mean architecture, the way in which the various episodes are dovetailed in, as the way in which they are originally viewed. The traditional way of telling a story can be illustrated by an image of a car running along a road which has length but little breadth, and passing a succession of objects in a definite order. We begin at the beginning, and go straight through to the end. Even if there are half a dozen strands of interest in the story, and we hop from one to another, the image still holds good. One need only widen the road, and have a stream of parallel one-way traffic, with such varieties of speed, etc., as suit the author's predilection. But some of the new novelists

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approach their story in a quite different manner. Instead of a road, the story may be pictured as a field, and the chief event or feature as a post, stuck up somewhere in the field, to which cows come every now and then, and rub themselves.

We may be presented with a story in which the sequence of events is unimportant: at least, in which the sequence of events as presented is not that in which the events originally occurred. "Originally occurred" begs the question; we have no right to suppose that the author envisaged his story otherwise than as he has presented it; but I am assuming a reader, reared on the traditional novel, who for his own convenience is at pains to sort out what actually happened, and arrange it in the left-to-right time sequence which his mind demands. It is possible that he may have to be asked to regard this sorting and this sequence as unimportant, if not an actual hindrance to his understanding of the new work.

What is more, the change may extend from structure to the use of language. The reader may be asked to contemplate a page of which the meaning does not depend upon the left-to-right sequence he has used from childhood. It is all a question of what we may call the unit of comprehension. With an infant, this is one word only. Soon, however, we learn to extend this, and can take in the meaning of three or four words at once, without depending upon their order. A child of six or seven can receive "big new snow-man" as a unit. "Limping little pink-eyed spotted dog" will convey a single impression, which will not be disturbed by a rearrangement of the order of the adjectives. A really quick professional reader can assimilate meaning in far longer units. What is more, if he is familiar with, say, German, in which the order of words in a sentence differs markedly from the

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English order, or Latin, where it is more arbitrary than in either—where, as a rule, order is the last thing at which one looks for a clue to meaning—he learns to depend less and less on the left-to-right method. He learns to take word-blocks of varying length as his unit.

I suggest that among the things demanded of the reader by Joyce in his later work is an extension of this capacity, which will enable him to comprehend a still larger unit, the paragraph. Obviously no one can take in, by a single act of apprehension, a long paragraph. What he can do, however, is to suspend his effort to make sense of it until he has reached the end. Instead of saying to himself, *seriatim*, "Now what exactly does that mean?" as he passes from image to image in left-to-right order, let him receive the images at their face value and *then, at the end, try to see what effect the paragraph as a whole has left upon his mind*. For, if a novelist may apply new time conceptions to his whole book, and use the post-in-a-field technique, why should he not apply it to the single paragraph, and deliver what he has to say in collective impressions, each of which, like the simpler combinations of noun and adjective with which we are familiar, does not derive its meaning from the order in which its component parts are arranged?

It is worth remarking here that a great many of the first readers of *Ulysses* were bothered because they could not recognize progression in it: because its approach to the time problems of narrative was not that to which they were accustomed.

This, then, is a first suggestion for approaching a communication¹ of such undoubted difficulty as *Work in*

¹ I am making the fundamental assumption that *Work in Progress* is a communication, since otherwise our enquiry leaves literature and becomes a study in individual psychology.

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Progress. The next step is to examine the language in which the impressions are conveyed.

V

With Joyce words have always had a value in themselves, apart from their value as the names of things and qualities. He has more than a poet's, more than a singer's, more than a priest's sensitiveness to them. The key passage comes from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to himself: A day of dappled seaborne clouds.

The phrase and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the greyfringed fleece of clouds. No, it was not their colours: it was the poise and balance of the period itself. Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose?

He passed from the trembling bridge on to firm land again. At that instant, as it seemed to him, the air was chilled: and looking askance towards the water he saw a flying squall darkening and crisping suddenly the tide. A faint click at his heart, a faint throb in his throat told him once more of how his flesh dreaded the cold infra-human odour of the sea: yet he did not strike across the downs on his left but held straight on along the spine of rocks that pointed against the river's mouth.

A veiled sunlight lit up faintly the grey sheet of water where the river was embayed. In the distance along the course of the slow-flowing Liffey slender masts flecked the sky and, more distant still, the dim fabric of the city lay prone in haze. Like a scene on some vague arras, old as man's weariness, the image of the seventh city of christendom was visible to him across the timeless air, no older nor

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more weary nor less patient of subjection than in the days of the thingmote.

Disheartened, he raised his eyes towards the slow-drifting clouds, dappled and seaborne. They were voyaging across the deserts of the sky, a host of nomads on the march, voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound. The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races. He heard a confused music within him as of memories and names which he was almost conscious of but could not capture even for an instant; then the music seemed to recede, to recede, to recede: and from each receding trail of nebulous music there fell always one long-drawn calling note, piercing like a star the dusk of silence. Again! Again! Again! A voice from beyond the world was calling.

There are here the germs of the vocabulary and technique of *Ulysses*, the hieratic concentration on words themselves, the evocative rhythms of *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, the associative multi-lingual stuff, the dream vocabulary of *Work in Progress* as a whole; and something besides. Joyce's feeling for words, whether he is conscious or not of the fact, is magical. Words are the material for incantation. Here again *A Portrait of the Artist* supplies the clue, in the religious scenes, where the Latin words exercise upon the fainting heart of Stephen Dedalus their more than symbolic meaning. Here, from angles so widely different that each would recoil in indignation, Joyce and Yeats meet: Yeats with his magic, Joyce with his superstition. Both use words as symbols, though in a very different way. Yeats seeks by symbol to come in contact with the memory of the race. For Joyce, symbol is in the first place a password to the inner consciousness of his characters. He is aware of the work of Freud, upon which Yeats deliberately turns his back. For Joyce, it is the associations of word or symbol *in this world* which are important, not its correspondence to something outside time and place. He is after the local and the particular,

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which he invokes by every means in his power. Words are his ritual, his incantation, and he is as serious in their use as any priest. In many of the scenes in *Ulysses* their use is governed by theory. In others, there is more than intellect behind the choice. His avowed purpose was so to reconstruct Dublin, in the compass of a single day of June 1904, that if the city were swallowed in an earthquake a reader of the book would find a perfect record of what had gone: a record not only of stick and stone, but of feeling, thought and character. More than photographic description is needed for such a reconstruction. Magic is needed: and magic proceeds by incantation.

VI

How potent is Joyce's technique of incantation can be seen from *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, particularly in the closing paragraphs. By a dreamy, rhythmic movement, a gradual whispering of faint pictures, a scene, a mood, an impression is evoked, elusive, without detail, a glimmer of summer twilight, perceived by a dreaming mind that is at once a tree on the bank, a stone, an old woman talking to herself and to others, the river that is flowing by, and the sky that floats reflected in it, and all that rivers and stones and trees and old women have ever meant to man. The appeal is not to the conscious mind, but to the mind in dream, which is reached by a series of gentle, indefinite calls to the lulled senses. No image is so sharp as to project from the twilight: each makes its faint silvery impact, and fades blurred into the dream, into the music of the whole crepuscular incantation.

Effects of such delicacy obviously cannot be attained without precision, and here Joyce's pernickety side has its share. The language of *Work in Progress* is the most

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astonishing blend of imagination and pedantry he has yet achieved. He is, throughout, essaying a dream language. *Ulysses* dealt with day. *Work in Progress* deals with night. If in day-time language must change to suit its theme, then the language of night-thinking, that series of apparently illogical leaps by which we progress in dream, must likewise be suited to the activities it describes. So, to make the language of *Work in Progress*, have gone all the allusions, the associations, the puns, the cross-correspondences from language to language, from experience to experience, the accidents, the mistakes, the childhood memories, everything in the life of everyman (Here Cometh Everyman, H. C. Earwicker, Haveth Childers Everywhere, etc.) which has brought about that any one object or idea shall recall or join hands with any other, or be fused with it into a dream object or idea, incomprehensible at first sight to the conscious mind.

Some time ago I awoke from a dream with two words vividly upstanding before my mind's eye: HIGGERTH MIZZERS. They appeared in print as the headline of a newspaper, persisting after I was awake, and visible with decreasing clarity every time I shut my eyes again. I could make nothing of them at first. It was not until I had forgotten, and suddenly remembered them again, that I came upon the clue. They were an amalgam of two names in which I was interested, plus a memory connected with one of the names. The first name was Harry Mizler, a light-weight boxer whose performance I had been following. The second was Mis Tor, a horse I had occasionally backed. My reason for backing it was largely sentimental: Great Mis Tor is the highest peak of Southern Dartmoor, where I used to live, and I have often climbed it. Another name for it is High Mis Tor (there is a Little Mis Tor, not far away). A Devonian for "great" says

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"gert"; he would call it Gert Mis Tor. He also adds a final *h* to "height" and calls it "heighth". The horse won one of its races: the boxer also appeared in headlines. The component parts of HIGGERTH MIZZERS are no longer obscure. Similarly, and more simply, dreaming that I was looking for a reserved seat on a train, I told the porter I wanted "Number Empteen".

I give these because they shed a light on the formation of the Joyce dream vocabulary. Take a phrase from *Work in Progress*, where flies go "rotandinking round his scalp". The word is graphic enough, and many readers will not stop. It suggests drunken staggering, and they will be content with that. But, when the roller-skating boom was at its height, the chief rink in Dublin was in the hall called the Rotunda. So to the other suggestion is added the rotary motion of roller skating, plus the name associated with it in the Dubliner's mind: for the dreamer, however much he is everyman, is a Dubliner, for whom the place names of his city, Howth, Chapelizod ("Hothelizod"), Terenure, Glasnevin, Capel Street ("Qu' appelle?"), Rathfarnham, will always be a personal music. Joyce does not hesitate to delve into this Dubliner's deepest, most local memories, nor for that matter into stores of erudition of his own: though these will not perhaps be as difficult for the general reader as the local references. There is a page in a recently published section of the *Work* which I was only able to understand (dimly at that) through memories of the advertisements in the Dublin trams when I was a child.

Mr J. W. Dunne, the exponent of Serialism, suggests that the confusion we experience in dreams, the way in which we are now inside a room, and now on top of a mountain, without any sense of transference or incongruity, may be due to our attempts to apprehend a multi-

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dimensional world in terms of the three dimensions to which we are accustomed. Part of our difficulty with Joyce's paragraphs may likewise be due to our habitual attempt to apprehend from left to right. I have found myself that if I keep my mind unfocussed and read a paragraph aloud two or three times, a collective meaning grows before my mind: a whole picture. "Picture" is the exact word. When we are confronted with a large canvas crowded with detail, we look at it in two ways. We look at it first as a whole: then we come closer and study the details. It may take us a long time to get hold of what each of the figures is doing, and so on. Finally we stand back, and look at it once more as a whole. Why not treat one of Joyce's paragraphs like this? Nothing but habit stands in the way.

The real difficulty Joyce has put in his readers' path is not word puzzles, nor erudition, nor Dublin lore, but the fact that he is asking them to *unlearn* something: to study a page as a picture and not as a series of logically connected images arranged in lines from left to right. Faulkner and Isherwood have asked readers to rearrange their ideas of order in the telling of a story. Joyce asks it in the page, the paragraph, the sentence.

VII

The question naturally arises, Where will all this take us? Into a new tract of country, or up a *cul de sac*?

Joyce has exercised a profound influence on the practice of subsequent novelists, but it has come through *Ulysses*. The later technique has found few imitators. It is not a general technique, but a very special set of tools forged for a special purpose. The word-amalgams have been copied, but to little purpose, and generally by people who

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do not know what either they or Joyce are at. This has been the general trouble, as regards imitators—that these new methods are hard to understand. Most readers, most novelists, and most critics have been standing back, waiting for the work to be finished, or, failing that, waiting to see what the other man is going to say about it. There is no disgrace in this. To get the hang of a revolutionary technique requires time. But, if one's mental muscles are not too stiff, one may twist round far enough to envisage certain new possibilities. One may even unlearn, painfully and temporarily, a fixed habit. The reader of poetry has an advantage here.

A mark of the experimental novelist is that he demands an alteration in the level of consciousness of the reader. The traditional novelist comes down to the reader's level (of consciousness: in no derogatory sense), takes him by the hand, and leads him where he will. The experimental novelist remains where he is; the reader, if he is to follow him, must come to his level. This beckoning technique, shared with many contemporary poets, Joyce has in high degrees: and here, it may be guessed, his influence will prove strong. It is realized nowadays that one can tell a story, even a short story, from several angles in space and time. We may get a similar freedom with the sentence and the paragraph, a writing that is pictorial in a double sense, a scene that makes its effect by compelling the reader to take a bird's-eye view of it. The prospect holds fascinating possibilities. If they are realized, we shall owe a great deal to the superstitious dapper Irish novelist with the tenor voice which, never trained to fulfilment, has added another nostalgic strain to the threnody of the vanished city.

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